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“Le Tricolore et l'étoile”; The Origin of the Acadian National Flag, 1867-1912

THE CREATION OF AN ACADIAN FLAG and other national symbols was a natural function of the growth of nationalism during the “Acadian Renaissance” of the late 19th century. While the establishment of an autonomous state was of little realistic concern to the rising Acadian professional class, national emblems were crucial to the position of an elite whose leadership was not dependent upon control of a state apparatus. French historian Edmé Rameau de Saint-Père, who regarded the traditional Acadian lack of government and central direction as a protection against outside influences, realized as early as the 1850s that in order to link the various dispersed fragments of the Acadian nation, Acadians needed symbols — namely a patron saint and “un signe de ralliement”.¹ Acadian national symbolism was therefore designed to inspire ethnic solidarity and to act as a substitute for material advancement through acceptance of the capitalist and assimilationist structure of English Canada. The importance of the flag as one of these symbols cannot be overemphasized, because the flag was — and is — central to the way in which Acadians see themselves, and to the way in which they are seen by others. A flag, as David Kertzer notes, not only represents a nation — eventually, it also comes to define a nation and to provide the parameters by which a people can identify itself.²

The creation of Acadian symbols paralleled the development of similar emblems in Quebec and elsewhere. Indeed, the second half of the 19th century saw a proliferation in national symbolism, although many of the fragile new nations then developing — particularly under the guidance of a native professional intelligentsia — apparently felt that their claim to nationhood was too tenuous to ignore the inspiration of older and larger national models. The Boer republics adopted modified versions of the Dutch tricolour as their own; the newly emergent Slavic nations of east-central Europe almost uniformly embraced the so-called

1 Edmé Rameau de Saint-Père, *La France aux Colonies* (Paris, 1859), pp. 114-6. For two very different opinions about the wisdom of the nationalist elite in abjuring the creation of an Acadian state, see Naomi Griffiths, *The Acadians: Creation of a People* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 82-5; and Michel Roy, *L'Acadie Perdue* (Montreal, 1978), pp. 155-7.

2 David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, 1988), p. 7.

Pan-Slavic colours of Imperial Russia; and the Rumanian flag was based upon that of France, the world's major Latin power. Acadians themselves noted that the new Dominion of Canada used the British ensign combined with a Canadian crest.³ This tendency to imitate existing models of nationalism created two basic problems for Acadians in the adoption of national emblems. First, there was a deep split among the professional elite over the issue of whether cultural development should be secured independently or through fusion with the French Canadians; and second, while there was a consensus that France should serve as an inspiration to Acadian nationalism, there was no agreement whether that inspirational role should be filled by a remembrance of the Old Regime or by a pragmatic acceptance of modern France. Since French Canadians had adopted the French tricolour as their own emblem by the second half of the 19th century, these two primary problems were intertwined in the selection by Acadians of a national flag.

Initially, in their search for national symbols, the Acadian elite inevitably reflected the heavy influence of French Canada. Québécois clergymen were instrumental in assisting the growth of a French-language Acadian schools system during the mid-19th century, and the first major daily newspaper for Acadians, *Le Moniteur Acadien*, was founded in 1867 by French Canadian journalists.⁴ Moreover, French Canadians not only directly influenced Acadian development, but they also pointed the way for the first generation of Acadian professionals, who gradually began to emerge from the new French-language schools and colleges, and who sought to convert Acadian folk culture into a fully-fledged nationalism. The most obvious means of achieving this goal was to treat embryonic Acadian nationalism as an adjunct to the French Canadian sense of self-identity, and to follow French Canada's lead in adopting St.-Jean Baptiste as a national patron. Father Camille Lefebvre, the Québécois founder of Collège St.-Joseph, launched a St.-Jean Baptiste club in Memramcook during the 1860s, and the movement also flickered to life in a few villages in Prince Edward Island and in the mixed French Canadian-Acadian parishes of Madawaska.⁵ On the flag question, there were two schools of thought within the

3 Ferdinand Robidoux, ed., *Les Conventions Nationales des Acadiens* (Shediac, N.B., 1907), p. 172. See also p. 178.

4 For studies which tend to emphasize the defining role of Quebec and France in the Acadian Renaissance, see Michel Roy, *L'Acadie des origines à nos jours* (Montreal, 1981); Martin Spigelman, "The Acadian Renaissance and the Development of Acadian-Canadian Relations, 1864-1912", Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1975; and Raymond Mailhôt, "Prise de Conscience Collective Acadienne au Nouveau-Brunswick (1860-1891) et Comportement de la Majorité Anglophone", Ph.D. thesis, Université de Montréal, 1973.

5 *L'Album-Souvenir des Noces D'Argent de la Société Saint-Jean Baptiste du Collège Saint-Joseph, Memramcook, N.B.* (Memramcook, 1894), p. 21; *Le Moniteur Acadien* (Shediac), 4 July 1867;

St.-Jean Baptist faction, although these lines of division were so amorphous that they might properly be regarded as mere tendencies, at least until the 1880s. Since the French republican tricolour had been the predominant symbol of the French Canadian nationalist movement since the mid-19th century,⁶ many Acadians also placed their loyalty in this symbol. Its first documented display in Acadia occurred during the decade after 1867; after Confederation supposedly “reunited” Acadians and French Canadians, Father Lefebvre hoisted the tricolour each 24 June in honour of St.-Jean Baptiste.⁷ An 1880 convention of French-speaking groups in Canada and the United States adopted the tricolour as the flag of a vague Franco-North American union — a proposal approved by Acadian delegates to the conference⁸ — and this resolution probably gave the tricolour some measure of official standing as an Acadian banner.

Pascal Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L'Acadie* (Montreal, 1898), p. 216; Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens* (Montreal, 1955), p. 764; Mailhôt, “Prise de Conscience Collective Acadienne”, pp. 196-7, 204-5, 299; Etienne Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre (1831-1895) et la renaissance acadienne* (Moncton, 1983), pp. 660-3, 711-3; Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 248-9; and *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 65, 67, 70. For the introduction of the St.-Jean Baptiste movement into Prince Edward Island, see G. Belcourt to E. Rameau, 24 June 1865, 2.1-7, Centre d'Etudes Acadiennes [CEA]; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 4 July 1867 and 10 July 1868. St.-Jean Baptiste festivities developed in northwest New Brunswick due to the influence of Québécois colonists in the region. George Sirois, “La Participation des Madawaskayens aux conventions nationales acadiennes”, *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne*, V, 3 (1974), p. 123.

- 6 The French tricolour was introduced into the mainstream of French Canadian society during the 1840s, and by 1860 had become the de facto national banner. However, much of the Québécois intelligentsia also retained a sense of nostalgia for the fleur-de-lis flag of the *ancien régime*, and by the late 19th century conservatives were calling for its restoration as a national symbol. Benjamine Sulté, “Le Drapeau tricolour en Canada”, *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques*, 10, 5 (1904), pp. 151-7; Col. A.F. Deguid, “The Tricolour in Canada”, *The Canadian Defence Quarterly*, X, 2 (1933), pp. 215-6; Raoul Roy, *Pour un drapeau independantiste* (Montreal, 1965), pp. 13-42; Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Société Saint-Jean Baptiste de Montréal* (Montreal, 1975), pp. 94-5; Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1967* (Toronto, 1968), I, pp. 301-2; Lucien Philippe, “The French Tricolor and its Influence on Flags Throughout the World”, *The Flag Bulletin*, 8, 2-3 (1971), p. 65; Jacques Archembault and Eugénie Lévesque, *Le Drapeau Québécois* (Quebec, 1974), pp. 16-8; Maurice Léger, “Centenaire du drapeau acadien — Un historique”, *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne*, 14, 4 (1983), pp. 113-4; and François Beaudoin, “Flags of Quebec”, *The Flag Bulletin*, 13, 5 (1984), pp. 151-3.
- 7 Recorded instances of the tricolour's display prior to 1883 (at Memramcook and elsewhere) are *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 14 July 1867; 3, 10 July 1868; 26 May, 10 September 1869; 20 January, 21 July 1871; 28 June 1872; 2 July 1874; 17 February 1876; 9 June 1881; and 14 September 1882. For Pascal Poirier's exhortation to Acadians to join the St.-Jean Baptiste movement and march beneath the tricolour, see *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 1 July 1870.
- 8 H.J.J.B. Chouinard, ed., *Fête Nationale des Canadiens-Française* (Quebec, 1881), pp. 393, 396; Rumilly, *Histoire de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal*, pp. 121-3; Archembault and

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By the late 1870s, however, there were signs of dissatisfaction with the tricolour. Use of the French flag had begun during the 1860s, when it represented the officially Catholic regime of Napoleon III, but after 1870, the tricolour again stood as a symbol of French republicanism, with all the “revolutionary” and anti-clerical connotations which galled the Acadian elite. For instance, Father Phileas Bourgeois, a professor at Collège St.-Joseph, noted that “La France de nos jours n’est pas la France des rois chrétiens...nous voyons ses drapeaux flotter au vent du 14 juillet pour rappeler le *ça ira* et la *Bastille*”.⁹ Lefebvre was apparently bothered by similar concerns, and in June 1877 — on Bourgeois’ initiative — he replaced the tricolour atop St.-Joseph with a white fleur-de-lis flag, dramatically observing that it was the first time since the conquest that the old Bourbon banner had floated over Acadian soil. In fact, this flag was regarded not only as the banner of the college, but was also promoted as “le drapeau national”, and was flown as such above the first Acadian national convention which met in Memramcook during the summer of 1881.¹⁰ This division of opinion, between advocates of the white flag on one side and champions of the tricolour on the other, followed similar lines of battle which were also forming in both France and Quebec, and which in each case pitted conservatives, who fondly remembered the supposed harmony and religious orientation of the Old Order, against moderate pragmatists, who accepted the place which the tricolour had won in the hearts of Frenchmen and the general value which it had assumed in projecting a sense of Frenchness around the world. Although the evidence is thin, it appears that in Acadia the clergy tended to favour the white fleur-de-lis flag, and the lay elite preferred the tricolour.

Both these factions continued to rally around St.-Jean Baptiste, but a third school of thought entirely rejected the Québécois patron, as well as the general trend toward cultural integration with French Canada. The chief figure in this nativist faction was Father Marcel-François Richard, a native Acadian and an ultramontane activist whose vision was a rural, religiously-oriented, and distinctive

Lévesque, *Le Drapeau Québécois*, p. 18; and Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 245-55.

9 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 54.

10 C. Lefebvre to P. Poirier, 18 June 1877, 6.1-1, CEA; Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, pp. 874, 876, 1021; *L’Album-Souvenir des Noces D’Argent de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste du Collège Saint-Joseph*, p. 33; and *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 28 March, 27 June 1878; and 3 June 1880. This white merino wool flag featured a single fleur-de-lis upon a blue shield in the centre of the field, and below this escutcheon was a banderole with the anti-materialist motto, “Fortuna opes auferre, non animum potest” — “Fortune can bring possessions; it can not bring character”. (Translation from Latin by Professor Emerita M.E. Milham, University of New Brunswick.) Gilbert Girouard’s recollection of the flag which flew over the first Acadian national convention is in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 30 August 1883.

Acadian nation. Although Richard's emphasis on the desirability of a rural and pious existence also reflected the weight of conservative Catholic influences from French Canada,¹¹ this intellectual debt was not acknowledged and Richard was intent upon creating a supposedly distinctive Acadian nationalist ideology. Ordained in 1870, Richard quickly launched himself into a whirlwind of nationalist activity; by the mid-1870s, he had begun a campaign for an Acadian bishop, which no doubt cooled his relationship with the local Irish and Scottish higher clergy. Richard was also at odds with Father Lefebvre, since he saw Collège St.-Joseph as too bilingual, too cosmopolitan, and too French Canadian. In reaction to these perceived faults in the Memramcook institution, Richard founded his own small college based in his home parish of St.-Louis-de-Kent, a school which was specifically designed to produce devoted Acadian nationalists.¹² Richard regarded the Virgin Mary as a suitable and symbolic patron of the Acadian nation, and as a vivid reminder of by-gone days, since the Assumption of the Madonna had once served as the national holiday of Bourbon France.¹³ By the late 1870s, he was busy instilling among his parishioners a regard for the Virgin Mary that was both religious and patriotic. Celebration of the Immaculate Conception became an elaborate ceremony in St. Louis, and in 1878, Richard led a "national pilgrimage" to St. Louis' newly constructed Grotto of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes.¹⁴ Richard also displayed the French tricolour at Collège St.-Louis,¹⁵ although it is likely that many followers of his particularist brand of nationalism probably favoured the idea of a more distinctive Acadian flag.

The Marianistic aspect of Richard's ministry stood, of course, in stark contrast to the activities of St.-Jean Baptiste advocates at work in the Maritimes, and these factions finally clashed at the first Acadian national convention in 1881. At the 1880 convention in Quebec, Acadian delegates had resolved to convene a wholly

11 Michel Roy has called Acadian particularism "une application acadien du nationalisme québécois". Roy, *L'Acadie des origines à nos jours*, pp. 199-200, 205-6.

12 Spigelman, "The Acadian Renaissance", pp. 44-5, 216-7, 219-30; and Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, p. 990.

13 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 62-3. In fact, as he later admitted, Richard saw the Madonna as such a satisfying and holy image of adoration for the French element in America that he could not understand why French Canadians had failed to adopt the Virgin as their own patron. However, he concluded that French Canada's loss was Acadia's gain. *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes* (Bathurst), 25 September 1902.

14 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 16 December 1880; 27 June 1878; Mailhôt, "Prise de Conscience Collective Acadienne", pp. 300-1.

15 Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, p. 865; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 14 September 1882.

Acadian convention during the summer of the following year in Memramcook. During an organizational meeting in the spring of 1881, it was also decided that a nine member commission at the Memramcook convention should formally choose an Acadian national patron,¹⁶ thus resolving a matter that had been discussed among Acadians since at least 1870.¹⁷ At issue was nothing less than the future self-identity of the entire nation — “une question de vie ou de mort pour les Acadiens comme peuple”, as one cleric noted.¹⁸ St.-Jean Baptiste elements saw the convention as a means of fostering their own movement and ensuring further links with French Canada; Acadian particularists saw the gathering as a vehicle for proclaiming cultural independence of French Canada by channelling the force of Acadian nationalism in a new direction, namely one of patriotic devotion to the Virgin Mary.

The supporters of the Virgin Mary lobbied for support even before the convention began, and had tilted the scales in their favour even in advance of the great debate; “Il est clair que nous, qui voulons la Saint-Jean-Baptiste”, lamented Phileas Bourgeois, “nous nous agitons sur un terrain inégal”.¹⁹ Marian activists on the nine-man commission outnumbered advocates of St.-Jean Baptiste by a two-to-one margin, and the final coup de grace came in the form of a successful motion to allow each of 30 priests present at the convention to participate in the commission’s deliberations and voting procedures. Since the majority of the clerical delegation were native Acadians — most of whom strongly backed the Virgin Mary as patron — the final result was a lop-sided vote of 12 to four in favour of the Assumption of the Madonna (15 August) as the national feast day. The general convention — composed of small lay delegations from each parish — subsequently ratified the choice of the commission, and the national holiday henceforth became the Assumption.²⁰

The choice of the Assumption has been well described by Bernard, Rumilly, Leblanc, and others,²¹ but — with the exception of Rumilly — these accounts

16 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. xxiii, 2-4; *Fête Nationale des Canadiens-Française*, pp. 445-6; and Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L’Acadie*, p. 215.

17 For an early discussion of the need for a national patron, see *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 22, 29 April, 6, 13 May 1870.

18 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 71.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44, 80-1; *The Daily Sun* (Saint John), 22 July 1881; and G.A. Girouard, notes on the first Acadian national convention, 1881, 565.1-1, CEA.

21 Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 785-8; Emery Leblanc, *Les Acadiens* (Montreal, 1963), pp. 28-36; Antoine Bernard, *Histoire de la Survivance Acadienne, 1755-1935* (Montreal, 1935), pp. 161-3; Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, pp. 955-70, 976-7, 980-5; and Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 263-9.

largely ignore the bitter aftermath of the convention, which nearly poisoned the lifeblood of Acadian nationalism. Supporters of St.-Jean Baptiste were unwilling to accept their defeat with grace, particularly since it did not seem fairly won, and there were grumblings in French Canada about Acadian “ingratitude” and “separatism”. Critics charged that a clique of Acadian “exclusivists” had exerted undue influence at the convention and had thereby insulted Acadia’s French Canadian confrères.²² A shadowy and yet influential movement, to which Rumilly has attached the sinister label of “cabal”, began to seek the abandonment of the Assumption and its replacement by St.-Jean Baptiste day. According to Pascal Poirier, ordinary Acadians were accosted and warned to celebrate St.-Jean Baptiste day rather than the Assumption, and there were even rumours about the organization of a counter-convention to overturn the results of the gathering at Memramcook.²³ Father Richard — one of the main forces behind the Assumption — hurriedly approached the local Irish bishops in order to extract official permission for honouring the Virgin Mary as Acadian patron, thus legitimizing the work of the Memramcook convention.²⁴ Gradually, the animosity over the national holiday appears to have blended into the problem of choosing an appropriate flag, an issue which came into greater focus during the early 1880s. The flag issue was clearly related to the question of national patron, since Acadian particularists wanted to increase the Marianistic content of national symbols while the St.-Jean Baptist partisans sought to limit the further development of an independent Acadian national consciousness. To a large extent, however, the clear dichotomy between the two sides dissolved as individuals within each faction found the tricolour either acceptable or unacceptable on ideological grounds.

One might surmise, for instance, that the natural impulse of the St.-Jean Baptiste movement would have been to favour the tricolour as part of a rearguard

22 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 4 August, 1 September 1881; Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L’Acadie*, pp. 217-8; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 788; Mailhôt, “Prise de Conscience Collective Acadienne”, pp. 410-1; and Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, p. 984. For an example of French Canadian leaders urging Acadians to amend their choice of national patron, see the speeches of Sir Hector Langevin and A.P. Caron reprinted in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 23 August 1883.

23 Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 792; Pascal Poirier, “Mes Mémoires”, *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne* 4, 3 (1971), p.117, and *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 22 September 1881. Martin Spigelman identifies Father Lefebvre and Pierre Landry as the two key figures who continued to oppose the Assumption. Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 271-2.

24 M.-F. Richard to the Bishops of the Archdiocese of Halifax, 16 September 1881, 8.1-10, CEA. The bishop’s approval was ratified by Pope Pius XI in January 1938. Both documents approving the Assumption are reproduced in Fr. M. Gildas, *La Vie de Mgr. M.-F. Richard* (Moncton, 1940), pp. 98-100.

effort to maintain some semblance of Acadian identification with French Canada and with the French world in general. In some cases, this was the actual reaction: Pierre Landry and his friend Ambroise Richard quite readily favoured the tricolour as a symbol of Frenchness,²⁵ and even Phileas Bourgeois argued at Memramcook that Acadians should owe some sense of commitment to the Franco-North American union promulgated in 1880, which implied not only the celebration of 24 June as a patriotic feast day, but also the display of the tricolour flag.²⁶ On the other hand, the true sympathies of Bourgeois and Lefebvre lay with the banner of Old France, and it is hardly surprising that such a spirit was diffused throughout Collège St.-Joseph.²⁷

One might also surmise that the natural instinct of Acadian particularists would have been to reject the tricolour used by French Canada in favour of some distinctive Marianistic design. In some cases this too was the actual state of affairs: two of the Acadian priests who had voted for the Assumption at Memramcook each produced Marian designs. Father Fidèle Belliveau hoisted an "Assumption day flag" in his parish of Fox Creek,²⁸ while Father Stanislas Doucet of Pokemouche suggested a rather cluttered design showing an elaborate representation of the Virgin Mary superimposed upon a cross.²⁹ Both flags were based upon fields of white, which not only recalled Bourbon France, but was also the colour of the flag of the Pope.³⁰ On the other hand, the great champion

25 During the celebration of the centenary of Dorchester in May 1883, Landry and Richard draped a large French tricolour from a tree in front of Landry's Dorchester law offices. Della Stanley is quite right, however, in noting that Landry never spoke openly on the flag issue. *The Moncton Daily Transcript*, 21 May 1883; and Della Margaret Stanley, *Au service de deux peuples: Pierre Amand Landry* (Moncton, 1977), p. 195.

26 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 51, 76-7.

27 For instance, the St.-Jean Baptiste club at St. Joseph's College adopted an ode to the white Bourbon banner as its official song. *L'Album-Souvenir des Noces D'Argent de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste du Collège Saint-Joseph*, p. 66.

28 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 25 August 1881 and 24 August 1882.

29 Doucet's original design was suggested in September 1881, and included a large blue "M" superimposed upon a representation of the Virgin Mary; this central element, in turn, was poised upon a cross either Maltese or Jerusalem in heraldic style (*Le Moniteur Acadien*, 8 September 1881). A similar flag was actually hoisted above the great Buctouche picnic of 1883 and was described by *Le Moniteur Acadien* as "un drapeau symbolisant l'Acadie d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui": "un *Ave Maria*, en l'honneur de la sainte Vierge; dans une couronne de fleurs de lys et de feuilles d'érable, la croix, au pied de laquelle repose une charrue" (*Le Moniteur Acadien*, 23 August 1883). Both flags had a white field.

30 The papal flag was often flown by Acadian clerics on special occasions. Recorded instances of display of this flag prior to 1884 are *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 4 July 1867; 10 July 1868; 26 May, 10 September 1869; 28 June 1872; and 14 September 1882.

of Acadian particularism, Father M.-F. Richard, produced a design based upon the tricolour, a design eventually chosen to serve as the national standard. One must wonder, of course, why the leader of the particularist wing of Acadian nationalism did not naturally gravitate toward a highly distinctive design which would have dashed the final hopes of Acadians and Québécois who wished to see considerable outside content in Acadian symbols. Richard, in fact, did nothing of the sort; rather, he boldly displayed the tricolour at St. Louis and seemed to frown upon anything else: “je ne puis m’accorder”, he said, “avec ceux qui prétendent que nous devons choisir un drapeau tout à fait différent de celui que représente notre mère-patrie”.³¹ The motive behind this view can only be guessed at, but it seems certain that Richard felt caught between conflicting trends, and that he recognized that a deteriorating state of relations between Acadians and the English-speaking majority had created a difficult set of circumstances.

On a personal level, Richard was upset by the enforced closure of Collège St.-Joseph under pressure from the local Irish higher clergy — who regarded it as “too Frenchy” — and he also came under pressure to curtail the annual “national pilgrimage” to the Marian grotto at St. Louis.³² Richard realized, however, that the deterioration of ethnic relations was not only confined to his own personal experience or to affairs within the church. The Acadian elite had opposed Confederation from the very beginning, and by the early 1880s it was widely believed that the supposed pact of good faith entered into by French and Anglo-Saxon communities through Confederation was gradually collapsing. Acadians resented the Anglo-Protestant attempt in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to secularize education — which struck at the roots of the Catholic school system — while English-speaking New Brunswickers took offense at the growing influence of Acadian politicians in both Fredericton and Ottawa. At the end of 1882 — three years before the Riel affair precipitated a major national crisis along language lines — *Le Moniteur Acadien* had already concluded that Anglo-Saxon and Irish prejudice was increasing in vehemence, as signified by the then familiar complaint about “French Domination”.³³

Because these storm clouds had gathered, Acadians were obviously ill-advised

31 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 172.

32 Bernard, *Histoire de la Survivance Acadienne*, pp. 154-6; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 789-91; Leblanc, *Les Acadiens*, pp. 55-6; Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, pp. 991-1005; Camille-Antonio Doucet, *Une étoile s’est levée en Acadie: Marcel-Françoise Richard* (Charlesbourg-Est, P.Q., 1973), pp. 104-35, 142-55, 158-9; Richard Wilbur, *The Rise of French New Brunswick* (Halifax, 1989), pp. 65-71; Mailhôt, “Prise de Conscience Collective Acadienne”, pp. 282-3, 392-3; and Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 230-1. For reference to pressure by Bishop Rogers to curtail the “national pilgrimage”, see M.-F. Richard to J. Rogers, 17 May 1884, 8.1-13, CEA.

33 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 28 December 1882.

to continue a divisive battle amongst themselves over symbolism. Father Richard had been deeply concerned by the attacks upon the authority of the Memramcook convention, and his probable reaction to the deterioration of ethnic relations with the Anglo-Saxon and Irish communities was a determination that debates over symbolism should never again split Acadians as in 1881. Moreover, it had already been suggested that bold manifestations of Acadian particularism only encouraged French Canada to draw back into itself — perhaps even to the extent of withdrawing its educational and missionary influences. Although Richard had disagreed with this contention in 1881,³⁴ he probably had some fear that the sensibilities of French Canada were already jarred. Rather than run any further risks, Richard resolved to reconcile his own particularist wing of Acadian nationalism with the views of outward-looking leaders like Pierre Landry, and he probably also hoped to mollify ruffled spirits in French Canada. Accomplishing such goals meant adopting a flag which would find a common ground of support among Acadians, perhaps by blending a transnational symbol of Frenchness together with an emblem of Acadian distinctiveness.

Even by mid-1882, Richard's thoughts on the flag question had begun to take form. In a short address delivered in St. Louis at the close of Assumption day festivities, he revealed for the first time his partially formed opinions on the flag matter, speaking of "quatre drapeaux dont les couleurs et les nuances semblent fort propres à confectionner le drapeau acadien". These four flags, in order, were the Marian flag (a blue and white bicolour), the flag of the Papacy, the French tricolour, and the Union Jack.³⁵ A letter published in the following year shows that Richard also toyed with the idea of adopting the emblem of a ship as the chief Acadian symbol, mainly because he supposed that sea travel was central to the Acadian experience.³⁶ The emblem of a ship was associated with the Virgin Mary and was obviously acceptable to the St.-Jean Baptiste faction, which had already emblazoned the symbol upon the gonfalon of the Maritime Provinces chapter of the movement.³⁷ Eventually, however, the emblem of a ship was relegated to the national insignia, as Richard settled upon a flag design which sought to capture most of the symbolic elements mentioned in his 1882 Assumption day address. The one element included in his address but missing in the eventual tricolour and star design was the Union Jack, or some similar symbol denoting the British Empire — the increasing troubles of the intervening years had probably

34 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 15 September, 27 October 1881; *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 61, 76.

35 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 14 September 1882.

36 *Ibid.*, 13 May 1883.

37 See *ibid.*, 1, 24 July 1870.

erased some of the rhetoric about British tolerance so politely aired in the 1882 speech. The final result was a design expressing what the Abbé F. Bourgeois neatly summed up as Richard's "three great loves": the Virgin Mary, the Vatican, and the French-Acadian nation.³⁸

In selecting the tricolour as the basis of this flag, Richard chose to share the flag of French Canada (as was noted at the time),³⁹ although he could never bring himself publically to admit copying the Québécois and always maintained that his primary aim was to reflect the popular regard for France which still burned bright in Acadian hearts.⁴⁰ The tricolour, said Richard, inspired sentiments of filial attachment to a motherland which had to be fondly remembered despite its faults: "Le drapeau tricolore est le drapeau de la France, dont nous sommes les descendants, et ce drapeau a droit de flotter par convenance internationale dans l'univers entier. Pour nous, Acadiens, ce drapeau nous dit simplement que nous sommes français et que la France est notre mère-patrie".⁴¹ Richard believed, however, that the active flag of France could be employed without denoting approval of the principles held by the leaders of the Third Republic, and he was one of a number of major figures interested in the flag issue who agreed to adopt the white fleur-de-lis flag *if* a monarchist restoration should ever occur in France and *if* the motherland itself should ever return to the old colours.⁴²

As a badge of nationality, and as a means of making some distinction between the Acadian flag and that of French Canada,⁴³ Richard sought to symbolize the Marianism that had become the national cult among Acadians largely because of his work. As a symbol of Mary he chose a five-pointed star, which stood for the Stella Maris, the Marian star of the sea.⁴⁴ This emblem had identified Mary as a patron of mariners since the 7th century, and had been recognized as an Acadian symbol since at least 1870.⁴⁵ Its Acadian context was no doubt strength-

38 *Ibid.*, 6 January 1916.

39 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 156, 178. It is interesting to note that when several French Canadian newspapers reported the design of the new Acadian flag, they described the flag only as the "drapeau français", thus pointedly omitting mention of the Stella Maris which distinguished the flag from that of French Canada and France. *Le Journal de Québec* (Québec), 26 August 1884 and *Le Courrier de St.-Hyacinthe* (Saint-Hyacinthe), 26 August 1884.

40 For reference to this popular regard for France, see Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L'Acadie*, pp. 202-3; and Emile Lauvrière, *La Tragédie d'un Peuple* (Paris, 1924), II, pp. 577-9.

41 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 172.

42 *Le Courrier du Canada* (Québec), 27 August 1884; *Revue Française* article reprinted in *L'Évangéline* (Digby, Weymouth, Moncton), 3 August 1905.

43 This role of the star vis-à-vis the French Canadian flag was noted in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, pp. 172, 178.

44 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 172, 178.

45 Marina Warner, *Alone of all Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1976),

ened by “l’Etoile”, a popular poem written in 1883 by Pascal Poirier which may have directly influenced Richard.⁴⁶

The Stella Maris on Richard’s flag was also endowed with its own special colour symbolism. Yellow, the colour of the star, was identified as a papal colour and reinforced Acadia’s ties to the Vatican at a time when the Acadian elite was seeking the elevation of an Acadian to the post of bishop, and was therefore particularly eager to curry the favour of the Papacy. The blue stripe of the tricolour was a natural background since blue was traditionally a colour symbolic of the Madonna, having been so established in Constantinople during the age when that city was the artistic and cultural centre of Christendom.⁴⁷ Although the yellow star occupied only a fraction of the total area of the flag, it was intended to represent a theme at least as important as the flag’s tricolour field. One authority on symbology notes that stars “can denote a spiritual, celestial, or other-worldly quality to a flag” — an especially telling comment in this case — and Jean Claude Vernex even sees Richard’s successful infusion of distinctive religious themes into Acadian national symbolism as a reinforcement of the myth that Acadians were a special “people of God”, thus ensuring that Acadian development would proceed along religious, rural and isolationist lines.⁴⁸

For every visionary like Richard, of course, there must also be a Betsy Ross who actually stitches and sews the intended design, and in the Acadian case this role was filled by a young grade school teacher named Marie Babineau, a parishioner and family friend of Richard. After she was asked to reproduce Richard’s design, Babineau simply cut a star-shaped hole into the canton of a commercially made French tricolour, wherein she then stitched a yellow cloth star. It is unknown what latitude and artistic license were exercised by Babineau within the instructions given by Richard, nor is the precise date of her handiwork

p. 262. Writing in 1870, Philippe Belliveau referred to “l’étoile d’or d’espérance qui scintillait à travers toutes [notre] infortunes”. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 15 July 1870. See also Phileas Bourgeois’ remarks made in 1880, cited in Maurice Léger, “Réflexions sur la drapeau acadien”, *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne*, 16, 11 (1985), p. 7.

46 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 23 August 1883. Poirier’s poem was printed again in *Le Moniteur Acadien* in the issue immediately following the second Acadian national convention where the tricolour and star was officially adopted, suggesting that it may have been a factor in determining the flag’s design. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 21 August 1884.

47 Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 266. The suitability of the blue stripe as a field for the star — because of its Marian associations — was clearly recognized during the 1880s. See *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 172, 178; *Le Courrier du Canada*, 27 August 1884; and *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 21 November 1889.

48 Emmet V. Mittlebeeler, “Stars in Heraldry and Vexillology”, *The Flag Bulletin*, XXII, 3-4 (1983), p. 127; Jean Claude Vernex, *Les Francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick* (Lille, 1978), pp. 187-8, 245-55.

known, although Babineau's son later suggested that his mother sewed the flag sometime during 1883.⁴⁹

Designing and sewing a flag was, of course, only the basic first step in creating a national banner; a second and even more important matter was that of attaining formal approval for the flag, and a third step was fostering its widespread use. In the Acadian case, these stages did not flow smoothly along a well-ordered course, although it might be argued that such an issue would be contentious in any context. As Irish statesman Eamon De Valera once observed, finding a consensus on a new national flag was always difficult unless that flag was raised in revolution or bloodied in battle, and therefore carried the emotional significance of those events within its folds.⁵⁰

Because of the rising consensus among Acadians that they should have some type of national flag, in June 1883 it was suggested that designs for the national flag should be sent to Pierre Landry, published in a special issue of *Le Moniteur Acadien*, and then voted upon at local parish meetings convoked by the clergy. However, developments in the summer of 1883 soon produced an even more suitable setting for the flag's adoption. At the great Buctouche picnic in August — an event which was in fact a semi-convention — it was decided that a second full-scale convention should be held during the following year, and that it should be convened outside New Brunswick, in order to rouse a greater sense of national feeling among Acadians living beyond the national heartland. The site chosen was Miscouche, a small community in western Prince Edward Island located near the edge of what is now called "la région Évangéline".⁵¹ After overcoming some bitter obstructionism by the Irish-Scottish higher clergy,⁵² a firm date for

- 49 Leblanc, *Les Acadiens*, p. 39; Alexandre-J. Savoie, *Un siècle de revendications scolaires au Nouveau-Brunswick, 1871-1971* (Montreal, 1980), I, p. 163; Père Hector Belliveau, "Alphee Belliveau: 40 ans de vie française à Fredericton, 1880-1920", *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne*, 7, 1 (1976), p. 30. The date of 1883 for the flag's creation is mentioned in the draft copy of Belliveau's article found in file 560.1-1, CEA. Evidence for the contention that the tricolour of the original flag was of commercial manufacture is as follows: first, the method of stitching is not the same in the case of the star as in the remainder of the flag; second, the numbers "555/XYZ" and "9 x 6" are pencilled along the border of the flag; and third, the metal grommets in the white heading of the flag are of the type found in commercially-produced flags. Deborah Robichaud, "Historique du Drapeau Acadien", unpublished research paper, Clement Cormier Museum, Moncton, p. 3.
- 50 De Valera, quoted in Lester Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson* vol. 3, (Toronto, 1975), p. 274.
- 51 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 7, 14 June, 23 August 1883 and 8 May 1884.
- 52 For the details of this battle, see E. Biron to E. Rameau, 23 July 1883; P. Poirier to E. Biron, 20 August 1884; E. Biron to E. Rameau, 23 September 1884, all in 2.1-23, CEA; Poirier, "Mémoires", p. 117; and *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 21 August 1884.

the Miscouche convention was finally set and each Acadian parish undertook the process of selecting a small delegation to accompany its priest to the gathering. At a pre-convention organizational meeting, a three man commission was also established in order to select a suitable Acadian flag and national anthem; Father Stanislas Doucet was appointed as reporter and Father André Cormier as secretary. Doucet, however, was in poor health — which had already limited his activities at the Memramcook convention — and since he was again sick in the months prior to the Miscouche meeting, he was eventually replaced on the flag commission by Richard, who had apparently maneuvered himself into a position from which he could succeed his ailing friend. Moreover, Richard received the elevated title of president of the commission.⁵³

Richard arrived in Miscouche on the 14 August 1884, equipped with Marie Babineau's flag and ready to inspire a consensus that it should be chosen as the national banner. After quickly deflating an attempt to revive the issue of national patron, Richard jumped headlong into the flag debate during the second day of the convention.⁵⁴ The principal men of consequence in favour of a white flag — Fathers Bourgeois and Lefebvre — were conspicuous by their absence from Miscouche, perhaps because they were still annoyed about the loss of St.-Jean Baptiste at Memramcook, and after considerable discussion, Lefebvre's "national flag" — the fleur-de-lis standard — was rejected because, with the exception of the 1815-30 period, it had not served as the flag of France for over 90 years. Indeed, it was suggested that adoption of such a standard as a symbol of French nationality would be interpreted as an insult to France and that anything but the tricolour would be labelled as "pretentious" and would damage Acadia's image in the eyes of foreign peoples. Richard's tricolour and star design was favoured by "humble" Acadia because it was recognized that the tricolour represented all the other French communities in the world.⁵⁵ This argument applied especially to Quebec, and in reporting the commission's decision, Father André Cormier declared that "les Canadiens nos voisins, nos amis, nos frères, que en ceci comme sous bien d'autres rapports devraient être nous dignes modèles, ne regardent-ils pas le drapeau actuel de la France comme leur propre drapeau? Oui, messieurs,

53 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 151-2; J. Rogers to W. Varrily, 5 January 1879, F. William Varrily Correspondence, 1879, Group III, 211-4, Bathurst Diocesan Archives; S. Doucet to G. Girouard, 5 June 1881, published in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 23 June 1881; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 15 May 1884; and M.-F. Richard to J. Rogers, 17 May 1884, 8.1-13, CEA;

54 M.-F. Richard to J. Rogers, 12 August 1884, 8.1-13, CEA; Poirier, "Mémoires", pp. 117-8; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 972-3; Spigelman, "The Acadian Renaissance", p. 277; and A. Allard to M. Léger, 2 July 1955, 8.4-8, CEA.

55 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 3 October 1889; and *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 178.

le tricolore, sans discuter les motifs politiques qui l'ont amené, flotte sur le Canada français".⁵⁶ The big losers were again Bourgeois and Lefebvre, albeit for exactly the opposite reasons than in 1881. Whereas their favorite patron had been rejected at Memramcook because Acadian particularists sought to emerge from the shadow of French Canada, their flag was rejected at Miscouche precisely because it seemed too much out of tune with outside influences. The Acadian leadership adopted the tricolour as a means of identification with the French world as a whole, *particularly* French Quebec, and this decision was largely an attempt to redress the hard-feelings caused by the bold adoption of a distinctive national patron in 1881, which had seemed a direct snub of the Québécois symbol of St.-Jean Baptiste.

In concluding its discussion, the commission decided unanimously in favour of Richard's proposal. Amid strains of "La Marseillaise" and other patriotic songs, this decision was then ratified by the entire convention when the crowd convened around the outdoor convention platform in front of Miscouche church. On the following morning, the flag was formally flown for the first time, and later in the day it first flew at sea over a steamship which carried many of the conventioners back over the Northumberland Strait.⁵⁷

After the heat and excitement of the convention faded, however, the new national flag still faced the crucial test of winning acceptance among the people it was supposed to represent. According to *L'Évangéline*, the spread of the Acadian standard was a particularly significant matter; the newspaper noted that display of the flag was an almost necessary prerequisite to the celebration of the national holiday and was generally an important means of arousing a sense of patriotism and religious fervour among the Acadian populace. Certainly, the editor of *L'Évangéline* had grasped at an essential truth: since the time of the French Revolution, flags and festivals have been regarded as the primary embodiments of a general national will, and as the sole elements capable of lifting the individual above the concerns of everyday life.⁵⁸ Thus we arrive at one of the most fascinating and important processes of modern history — namely, the diffusion of a sense of national feeling from the privileged middle class down to the lower strata of society. By all accounts, the voiceless class of Acadian farmers and fishermen often remained extremely passive in matters of nationalist activity until repeatedly agitated from above. Perhaps, as Antonine Maillet

56 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 178.

57 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 156, 162-4, 176; *La Minerve* (Montreal), 18 November 1884; Poirier, "Mémoires", p. 118; *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 1 August 1889; and Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L'Acadie*, pp. 219-20.

58 *L'Évangéline*, 19 July 1906; George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975), p. 74; and Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 9.

notes, the Acadian symbols adopted in the 1880s truly were an elitist-inspired mélange of imported royalist and republican emblems which drew nothing from Acadian folklore and thus had little relevance for normal folk.⁵⁹ One wonders, however, if even a patriotic symbolization of this folk culture could have captured the essence of the Acadian experience. The basic idea that the elite wanted to express was the supposed purity and humility of French-Acadian culture, but the very act of self-consciously elevating this theme to a symbolic level devalued it. After all, nationalistic pride in humility, simplicity, and piousness constituted a paradox.

There were also structural problems which inhibited the diffusion of Acadian national symbols. The usual mechanisms necessary for the spread of patriotic feeling were either a state, a strong national-cultural “society”, or a mass national political movement. Not coincidentally, all three were lacking in the Acadian case: there was no central government or state; the *Société Nationale l'Assomption* only developed in irregular spurts of activity; and Acadian politics were dominated by conventional political parties which were essentially unaffected by any sense of Acadian particularism. Because of these inadequacies, power did not radiate outward from an organized nerve-centre to coordinate display of the flag. The initiative was left in the hands of local leaders, which resulted in inertia when the local elite was poorly organized, lacked initiative, or was opposed to the flag for ideological reasons.

On the other hand, such weaknesses were partially compensated by the sympathetic position of the church: whereas nationalism has often been called a “secular religion”, the Acadian version of nationalism was closely intertwined with a spirit of conservative Catholicism and thereby benefitted greatly from the influence of the church. Since the church dominated Acadian schools and social services, its influence was vital, particularly after the beginning of the 20th century, as Acadian clergymen finally began to move into the middle and senior echelons of the local ecclesiastical hierarchy. After the 1880s, the tricolour and star was displayed above and inside Acadian churches; it was favourably mentioned in innumerable sermons; and it was flown on Acadian Catholic schools and carried on school excursions. At the top of the educational pyramid, the flag was flown above the three French-language classical colleges established in the Maritimes by the early 20th century. At the two Eudist colleges in particular, the tricolour and star was the only flag usually displayed,⁶⁰ and Eudist clergymen

59 Antonine Maillet, “Rabelais et les Traditions Populaires en Acadie”, Ph.D. thesis, l'Université Laval, 1969, pp. 26-9.

60 Photos P38/1, Eudists Collection; P4/5/0050, both in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick [PANB]; *L'Évangéline*, 14 May 1891, 21 July 1919; and *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 13 August 1908.

honoured the flag with several poems written to describe it.⁶¹ Once again, however, the initiative lagged in areas where local curés lacked the zeal necessary to encourage use of the flag,⁶² or in areas where the local priest lavished his attentions upon one community at the expense of another.⁶³ Despite all such difficulties, usage of the flag did slowly expand, mainly through displays of local initiative by the clerical and lay elite, although the later national conventions and the growth of the *Société l'Assomption*, created in 1903, were also key elements in the spread of the flag.⁶⁴ Judging by instances of flag usage documented in Acadian newspapers, the flag seems to have first appeared in Prince Edward Island and eastern New Brunswick,⁶⁵ and then radiated outward to more peripheral areas. The first recorded display outside the Maritime Provinces occurred during 1895 in Waltham, Massachusetts,⁶⁶ where there was a large

61 *L'Évangéline*, 6 April 1905; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 13 August 1908.

62 One letter writer noted in 1903 that "plusieurs curés, tout absorbés dans les choses spirituelles, n'ont pas encore entendu parler qu'il y avait un drapeau acadien et une fête nationale en Acadie". *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 2 July 1903. While this comment portrays the clergy so nobly as to stretch the bounds of belief, it does reflect the central role played by priests in the spread of the flag. More to the point was the observation of another contemporary observer regarding the mediocre response to the national holiday; he noted that apathy among Acadians was due largely to the failure of various community leaders to properly support and propagandize the holiday. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 24 August 1897. Similarly, on 19 July 1906, *L'Évangéline* noted that local curés had a central role in promoting the flag, thus implying that the absence of the flag in various areas might be attributed to the lacklustre performance of parish priests in providing leadership.

63 Note, for example, that as late as 1911, the flag was not flown in the small community of Gueguen during the national feast day because the local curé perennially spent the holiday presiding over the celebration in nearby Cocagne. *L'Évangéline*, 16 August 1911.

64 For instance, the first recorded appearances of the tricolour and star in Madawaska were in 1908, when its use was inspired by the St.-Basil national convention. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 27 August 1908. One of the main stated purposes of the *Société l'Assomption* was to rally "tous les Acadiens sous le même drapeau". Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 845 and Roy, *L'Acadie Perdue*, p. 138.

65 For early instances of flag usage, see *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 27 August 1885, 2, 9 September 1886; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 20, 27 August 1885, 6, 17, 31 August, 7 September 1886, 19 August, 2 September 1887, 20, 23, 27 August 1889, 24 December 1903; and Catta, *La Révérend Père Camille Lefebvre*, p. 1026. It was noted in *L'Évangéline*, 28 December 1887, that each of the Acadian parishes in Prince Edward Island had displayed the tricolour and star for several years (with the exception of Mount Carmel).

66 *L'Évangéline*, 19 September 1895. Although the Acadian flag attained some sense of patriotic devotion among Acadian emigré communities in New England, an effort to encourage usage of the flag in Louisiana failed. In the late 1930s, the *Société Nationale l'Assomption* actually supplied the Louisianians with a tricolour and star — which was dutifully displayed at a Franco-Louisiane Convention — but in the final analysis these southern Acadians preferred to develop their own distinctive flags and symbols. *La Voix d'Évangéline*, 31 March, 21, 28 April

expatriate Acadian community.

The documented display of the flag in a given area does not automatically indicate that the standard had a widespread following nor that it would be widely flown with any rate of regularity throughout subsequent years. In fact, several contemporary observers noted that the Acadian flag was still not regularly seen in many Acadian parishes as late as the first decade of the 20th century.⁶⁷ Moreover, it is impossible to determine the extent to which displays of the flag were stage-managed by the clerico-professional elite, as opposed to being genuine manifestations of patriotism by more humble social classes. The most that can be concluded is that the spread of flag usage was very slow — partly because of the flawed social and political mechanisms used to inspire that spread; and partly because ordinary folk were probably unresponsive to foreign-looking symbols to which they attached no great significance, but which yet laid claim to representing their innermost hopes and aspirations. There is some evidence that the tricolour had a lack of appeal during the 19th century even among rural folk in France itself,⁶⁸ and that the diffusion of national consciousness in the countryside was generally a slow and tortuous process.

Even while the Acadian flag was undergoing difficulty in winning broad public acceptance, the small elite at the pinnacle of Acadian society was simultaneously engaged in an angry and somewhat sterile debate over the design itself. The first of a number of revisionist efforts began in the late 1880s, when it became apparent that Richard's design was fitfully gaining a mediocre measure of acceptance, and when Acadian critics of French republicanism were concurrently appalled by the Third Republic's celebration of the centenary of the French Revolution. An article in *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes* in the spring of 1889 attacked Richard's design and precipitated a lengthy debate between anonymous correspondents to several Acadian newspapers; during the following year and a half, over 35 articles and letters-to-the-editor were published concerning the flag question.⁶⁹ This letters-to-the-editor battle of 1889-90 saw conservatives and extreme particularists split with Richard regarding the use of

1938; Thomas Arceneau, "The Louisiana Acadian Flag", *Acadiana Profile*, I, 1 (1969), p. 1; and "Le drapeau des acadiens de la Louisiane", *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique acadienne*, IV, 9 (1973), p. 393.

67 *L'Évangéline*, 19 July 1906; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 2 July 1903.

68 Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA, 1976), pp. 111, 389.

69 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 16, 23 May, 13 June, 25 July, 1, 22 August, 5, 19 September, 3, 17, 24, 31 October, 14, 21 November, 5, 12 December 1889; 2, 16, 30 January, 16, 27 March, 17 April, 29 May, 5, 19 June, 10 July 1890; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 14 February, 14 March, 8 April, 6 May, 6, 13 June, 11 December 1890.

the tricolour, which they saw as a betrayal of all that Acadia stood for. In their view, the tricolour was the “satanic” flag of the French Revolution and was indelibly “soiled” because of its origin: “Adopter un drapeau”, they said, “c’est adopter les idées qu’il représente”.⁷⁰

Opponents of the tricolour and star followed the lead of their French hero, the Count of Chambord, who had imperiled and eventually destroyed his own claim to the French throne because of his obstinate insistence on the replacement of the tricolour with the Bourbon flag of the *ancien régime*. This dogged determination was shared by the Acadian flag revisionists, who saw the fleur-de-lis as the natural flag of Acadians, not only because it represented the accomplishments of the great age of royalist Catholic France, but also because it was the actual flag which had floated over the settlements and forts of early Acadia.⁷¹ The only other competitor to the tricolour worth mentioning was a blue flag emblazoned with the Stella Maris. This pattern was suggested by a correspondent of *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes* and was actually flown in a few instances during the late 1880s. Like the white flag, it was meant to emphasize a distinctive sense of Acadian identity and to act as a reminder of medieval France because it was the same colour as the “Cape of St. Martin”, the legendary French standard which eventually formed the field for the fleur-de-lis “Bannière de France”.⁷²

Richard’s critics complained not only about the tricolour and star design but also about the means by which it had been chosen. Critics noted that since the president of the flag commission appeared at Miscouche with a banner already sewn, this design had a definite advantage over any others, and even Richard admitted that he had been indiscrete. Opponents of the tricolour believed that Richard had taken advantage of an emotionally charged gathering to foist his will, and that adoption of the flag had been rushed forward despite a lack of adequate public discussion.⁷³ Nearly identical allegations were made with regard to the choice of the national anthem, “L’Ave Maris Stella”, which was similarly chosen at Miscouche in a great gush of emotion encouraged by Richard, much to the detriment of several native Acadian compositions which might have borne consideration.⁷⁴ Richard later denied such allegations,⁷⁵ although it is perhaps

70 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 17 October, 22 August 1889.

71 *Ibid.*, 25 July, 22 August 1889 and 13 June 1890.

72 *Ibid.*, 31 July 1890; 17, 31 October 1889; 21 November 1889.

73 *Ibid.*, 16 May, 22 August, 17 October 1889; *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, p. 173.

74 For the adoption of L’Ave Stella Maris at Miscouche, see *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 156, 162-3. For complaints about the anthem because of its lack of native Acadian inspiration, see *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 20 November 1884; *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 9, 16 May 1889.

75 Speaking to the Caraquet national convention in 1905, Richard declared: “Le choix de ce

true that he and his allies had decided basic issues of national symbolism with a less than considerate regard for the benefits of public discussion and sedate reflection. It may be, as Michel Roy contends, that genuine pluralism simply does not come easily to conservative, rural societies.⁷⁶

The logical destination of the anti-tricolour movement was the Acadian national convention held at Church Point, Nova Scotia in August 1890. However, when the organizing committee of the Church Point convention met in December 1889, they made no provision for a reconsideration of the flag issue, thus almost ensuring that opponents of the flag would fail to cross the line between words and action. Although revisionists were informally invited in June 1890 to argue their case against the flag at Church Point, there was no administrative machinery for the convention through which the anti-tricolour movement could exercise influence.⁷⁷ Indeed, Archbishop Cornelius O'Brien, in his message to the conventioners, suggested that the flag question would no doubt find itself unworthy of consideration by such a gathering of serious men of affairs. In the end, the flag issue was not formally discussed at the Church Point Convention, although the flag itself was lauded by several speakers, and Father Belliveau warned that abandonment of the Stella Maris would risk losing the Virgin Mary's spiritual patronage.⁷⁸

Despite the failure of dissident Acadians to alter the national flag, developments overseas during the 1890s provoked a change of heart among many French Canadians regarding the tricolour, and, as always, the climate in French Canada affected the Acadians. In France, the church aligned itself with the reactionary Right in the Dreyfus Affair, thus inviting the abuse of French liberals and socialists. When a radical Republican-Socialist coalition came to power in 1899, it began an anti-clerical campaign which eventually resulted in the separation of church and state in 1905. The reaction of French communities across the Atlantic to these developments in the motherland was predictably one of sullen disappointment. Ironically, one of the new government's actions which they found most distasteful was the interdict against the display of religious emblems upon the tricolour.⁷⁹

By coincidence, a deterioration in relations between France and the British Empire also occurred at the turn of the century, due largely to the Fashoda

drapeau n'a pas été laissé à l'initiative et au caprice de particuliers; mais il est dû, comme celui de notre fête nationale elle-même, aux mûres délibérations et au libre et intelligent concours des représentants de l'Acadie toute entière". *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 19 April 1906.

76 Roy, *L'Acadie Perdue*, p. 36.

77 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 13 December 1889, 6 June 1890.

78 *Conventions Nationales des Acadiens*, pp. 213, 229.

79 Armand Yon, "Les Canadiens-Français Jugés par les Français de France, 1830-1939 (Part II)",

Incident of 1898, a clash of imperial interests in the Sudan. Originally, the English-speaking majority of the Maritimes had ignored the Acadian adoption of the tricolour and star.⁸⁰ Gradually, however, as use of the tricolour and star slowly spread, English-speaking Maritimers took note of its existence, and Acadian critics of the flag worried that use of the tricolour could inspire resentment against Acadians if Britain and France should ever develop a rift between them.⁸¹ As anticipated, when Anglo-French relations deteriorated, the chill between France and Britain — plus the simultaneous effect of the Manitoba Schools Controversy and the debate over Canadian participation in the South African War — provoked anger among English Canadians, and the use of the tricolour was attacked by various Conservative candidates during the election of 1900.⁸² A number of English-language dailies also condemned the use of the flag in Canada. The Halifax *Herald* was one of two major Nova Scotia papers to join its editorial voice to this anti-tricolour chorus. “The French flag is flaunted in Canada as evidence of a foolish ambition”, warned the *Herald*, its editor’s head no doubt swimming with Francis Parkman’s tales of Acadia’s historic disloyalty. “We have no room in Canada for a ‘distinct nationality’ that flaunts the flag of France or that of any other nation in preference to the British flag”.⁸³

Among French Canadians, the reaction to events in France and to the disruption of relations between France and Britain was a reconsideration of their use of the tricolour as a national flag. Attacks on the tricolour which had appeared in the right-wing French Canadian press as early as the 1880s began to intensify in breadth and scope, and in 1903 two committees of study were established — one in Quebec, the other in Montreal — to propose an alternative design for use as the national flag of French Canada. The flag chosen by these committees was the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur*, a blue and white design first raised by the Abbé Ephage Filiatreault at St.-Hyacinthe in 1902. Sometimes displayed with a sacred heart emblem, sometimes without, it was an early version of the Quebec provincial flag officially adopted in 1948.⁸⁴ As many French Canadians devoted themselves

Revue d'Histoire de L'Amérique-Française, XIX, 2 (1965), p. 255.

- 80 With the exception of the critical Chatham *World*, English newspapers took little notice of the Miscouche convention in general; in fact, the Charlottetown *Pioneer* was the only English-language journal even to send correspondents to the reunion. *The World*, 17 September 1884 and *The Charlottetown Pioneer*, 19 August 1884.
- 81 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 22 August, 17, 31 October 1889.
- 82 See article from *L'Écho de Manitoba* and correspondence from Caraquet printed in *L'Évangéline*, 18 October 1900.
- 83 *The Halifax Herald*, 13 December 1901.
- 84 *La Patrie* article reprinted in *L'Évangéline*, 29 March 1900; Roy, *Pour un drapeau indépendantiste*, pp. 32-5, 43-4, 46-7, 52-9, 60-1; and Archambault and Levesque, *Le Drapeau Québécois*, p. 21.

to this new flag, they came to regard the Acadian tricolour as “displeasing”, and they even revived an effort to have the Assumption revoked as national holiday in favour of St.-Jean Baptiste day.⁸⁵ French Canadians in the United States followed this lead. In 1908, Father Denys Larny of Baltimore, director of *l'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Franco-Américaine*, openly advised Acadian youth groups to hoist the new French Canadian flag as their “étendard particulier”.⁸⁶

Among Acadians, the move to introduce the new French Canadian flag also had some measure of success. Early 20th century photographs, for instance, show the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur* displayed in various Acadian settings.⁸⁷ Sometimes, the French Canadian flag was flown beside the Acadian standard, but on certain instances, such as the celebration of the national holiday at Tracadie in 1907, the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur* was hoisted alone with the obvious intention of substituting it for the tricolour and star.⁸⁸ The most notable incident involving the new flag was at Collège St.-Joseph, where the tricolour and star disappeared above the college in 1903, although the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur* and several other flags continued to fly above the institution in order to represent the nationalities educated there. The stakes were especially high in this case — since the ambiance at St.-Joseph set the tone for Acadian nationalism in general — and before the end of the year a student at the college had written an anonymous letter to *Le Moniteur Acadien*, charging that French Canadian assimilationists regarded the tricolour and star’s function as having been superseded by the display of the new French Canadian flag. The *Cercle des Jeunes Acadiens de Memramcook* evidently shared this belief, since they indignantly raised their own parish flagpole upon which the Acadian flag was hoisted, and there were even some unspecified instances of flag defacement.⁸⁹ Father André Cormier, the St.-Joseph bursar and onetime secretary of the flag commission at Miscouche, claimed that a worn

85 *L'Opinion Public* article reprinted in *L'Évangéline*, 6 May 1909; Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 272-6; and Deborah Robichaud, “Les Conventions Nationales (1890-1913): La Société nationale l'Assomption et son Discourse”, *Les Cahiers de la Société Historique Acadienne*, 12, 1 (1981), p. 46.

86 *L'Évangéline*, 21 May 1908.

87 Photos P38/14, P38/224, P38/240, P38/241, P38/663, P38/679, Eudists Collection, PANB.

88 *L'Évangéline*, 22 August 1907. For the blessing of a “drapeau national Sacré-Coeur” at St. Joseph, Cape Breton, see *L'Évangéline*, 25 August 1904; The French Canadian flag was recorded beside the Acadian flag at Caraquet (1905) and at Madawaska (1911). *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 19 April 1906 and 25 August 1911.

89 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 25 June, 20 August, 17 December 1903, and 31 March 1904; P.L. Mercure to P. Gaudet, 20 February 1904, 1.69-10, CEA. According to *L'Évangéline*, 19 July 1906, the novel idea of a town flagpole helped to inspire a veritable explosion of patriotism and enthusiasm among the local youth.

tricolour and star had been taken down during construction work at St.-Joseph and, with his attention distracted by these improvements, he had neglected to replace the old Acadian flag.⁹⁰ When dissension continued, Cormier reprimanded *Le Moniteur Acadien* for printing the complaints and invited critics of the college to prove their complaints before an ecclesiastical review board.⁹¹ Private discussion of the “flag question”, however, did not cease and, under continuing pressure, Cormier arranged to have a new tricolour and star sewn.⁹² On 18 March 1904, this new flag was triumphantly hoisted above St.-Joseph and was greeted by a fusilade from the student musketry corps.⁹³

Elsewhere, the rivalry continued between the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur* and the tricolour and star,⁹⁴ although the bulk of the elite stood by the tricolour, either passively or energetically. Valentin Landry, the influential editor of *L'Évangéline*, led the vanguard and reprinted in his columns a number of articles written in defense of the tricolour. *Le Moniteur Acadien* was somewhat less vigorous, although in 1908 it also published a “reminder” of the Acadian flag’s appearance and meaning.⁹⁵ In May 1908, Landry delivered a tart response to Father Larny’s suggestion regarding replacement of the Acadian flag: “A toute question de changement ou d’abandon de notre Drapeau, l’Acadien répondra la noble parole des Pontifes Romains à l’erreur: *Non possumus*. NOUS NE POUVONS

90 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 24 December 1903. The truth of the matter is difficult to ascertain. However, Collège St.-Joseph had been the primary centre of support for the old Bourbon banner, and Cormier was evidently one of the few backers of the tricolour and star at the school. On one prior occasion, at least, the Acadian flag had been taken down in Cormier’s absence, and only raised again upon his return. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 20 August 1886. Soon after the flag affair, relations between *L'Évangéline* and Collège St.-Joseph grew extremely frosty, due mainly to the reluctance of St.-Joseph to convert itself into a solely Acadian institution. In an editorial on 7 May 1908, *L'Évangéline* seemed to suggest that Father Larny’s advice regarding adoption of the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur* was meant to give comfort to certain personages at the college known to oppose Acadian nationalism. See also *L'Évangéline*, 23, 28 March 1908.

91 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 14 January 1904.

92 H.P. Leblanc, marginal note on copy of *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 24 December 1903. The flag question was still a lively topic of interest at St. Joseph’s in February 1904. P.L. Mercure to P. Gaudet, 20 February, 1.69-10, CEA.

93 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 31 March 1904.

94 A compromise between the two rival flags was suggested in 1910 by a school teacher from southwestern Nova Scotia, who proposed that Acadians adopt the *Carillon Sacré-Coeur*, but add the Stella Maris as a badge of Acadian nationality. *L’Impartial* (Tignish), 6 September 1910.

95 *L'Évangéline*, 29 March 1900, 19 April, 19 December 1901, 13 May 1909; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 9 July 1908. Many of the articles in *L'Évangéline* were from *La Patrie*, the main Québécois supporter of the tricolour.

PAS!”⁹⁶ Soon afterward, in an editorial printed immediately prior to the St.-Basil national convention, *L'Évangéline* announced that each and every Acadian had a duty to defend the “flag of Marie”, and to assemble beneath its folds: “Nul n’a le droit de lever un drapeau contre le DRAPEAU”.⁹⁷

It was only after 1910, however, that attacks against the tricolour subsided. At a conference on the French language held at Quebec in 1912, the Acadian flag was proudly flown above the congress and the gathering was placed under the dual protection of the Virgin Mary and St.-Jean Baptiste, which suggested to Acadians that their French Canadian cousins had at least temporarily come to terms with Acadian distinctiveness.⁹⁸ “Helas”, sighed the Abbé Lionel Groulx in 1915 — after listening to a flood of Acadian resentment about Québécois pressure against the Acadian flag and the Assumption — “nous nous sentons bien incapables de le contre-dire tout à fait”.⁹⁹ Moreover, the resentment of Anglo-Canadians against the tricolour partially dissipated after the outbreak of World War One and the resumption of a full-fledged Anglo-French alliance.

Although Acadian supporters of the tricolour and star had successfully argued its defence, it is notable that during the height of the assault upon the flag, they worked to deemphasize the association between the tricolour and France itself. Originally, the Acadian flag was generally described as being virtually the same as the French standard — “le drapeau Français ou plutôt le drapeau Acadien Français”, noted M.-F Richard in 1886.¹⁰⁰ However, in reaction to the argument by opponents of the flag that the Acadian standard represented

96 *L'Évangéline*, 21 May 1908. Landry’s basic wording and ideas in this phrase are borrowed from an anonymous letter-to-the-editor earlier printed in *L'Évangéline*, 24 April 1902.

97 *L'Évangéline*, 13 August 1908. Father Richard, naturally, was also a principal defender of the national flag during this difficult period: “C’est notre drapeau”, he said, “et nous ne pouvons en avoir d’autre”. *Revue Française* article reprinted in *L'Évangéline*, 3 August 1905. At the Caraquet national convention in 1905, Richard noted that the French Canadian flag “s’agite dans la brise pour nous rappeler une fraternité que nous chérissons”, but that the tricolour and star was an Acadian’s most tender love, “celui pour lequel il doit vivre et mourir”. *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 19 April 1906. For Richard’s description of the favourable effects of the flag — and the Assumption — upon Acadian opinion, see *L'Évangéline*, 6 September 1911.

98 Papers of Stanislas Doucet, 591-3, F-1451A, CEA.

99 Lionel Groulx, *Mes Mémoires* (Montreal, 1970), I, pp. 233-4. According to Martin Spigelman, only after 1910 did French Canadians cease intense pressure upon Acadia to conform to the Québécois standard. At that point, he contends, the Québécois seemed ready to support conditionally the concept of Acadian distinctiveness, if only to make peace with the Acadians and prod them into accepting the need for a practical alliance of French-speaking Canadians to meet the new Anglo-Protestant onslaught. Spigelman, “The Acadian Renaissance”, pp. 367-75. See also *L'Évangéline*, 24 January, 28 August 1912.

100 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 9 September 1886.

the principles of the French Revolution, and therefore of the Third Republic, advocates of the established design began to change the main pivots of their defence. It was suggested, for instance, that the addition of the *Stella Maris* had “baptized” and “purified” the tricolour, and cleansed it of its sins, or that the addition of the star was not as important in changing the flag’s nature as the fact that Richard’s design was simply not intended to represent republican France.¹⁰¹ Thus, the tricolour and star was no souvenir of the French Revolution and came to be regarded as something more than the flag of the Third Republic, although the colours were the same. In writing of the Acadian flag in 1898, Pascal Poirier explained: “Ce n’est pas le drapeau d’une puissance étrangère — celui de la France n’a pas d’étoile — c’est un drapeau nouveau, celui des Acadiens”.¹⁰²

To accentuate this distinctive nature and to emphasize the flag’s religious character, many Acadians also began to place religious emblems upon the tricolour’s white stripe, particularly the sacred heart symbol and the image of the Virgin Mary.¹⁰³ Moreover, the stripes of the flag were also given symbolic meanings which supposedly distinguished the flag from the banner of anti-clerical French republicanism. The blue-white-red combination was said to stand for special Acadian attributes like hope, innocence, and suffering, or humility, purity, and freedom, and when seen in an even more overtly religious sense, the stripes were interpreted as representing the Assumption, the Immaculate Virgin, and martyrdom.¹⁰⁴ One might assume, of course, that this conscious process of myth-making was a rather ineffective attempt to hide the obvious, and that the only effective means of “Acadianizing” the flag was for it to assume — over a period of time — a truly significant place in the hearts and minds of average Acadians.

After the Acadian Renaissance — which is usually dated from the time of Confederation to the outbreak of World War One — Acadian nationalism entered a long period of dormancy. It is true that the nationalist elite revived

101 *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 2 January 1890 and *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 6 May 1890. Such arguments were paraded before a French Canadian audience by Father P.C. Gauthier in 1912. The venue was the French-language conference in Quebec. *L’Évangéline*, 3 July 1912.

102 Poirier, *Père Lefebvre et L’Acadie*, p. 220.

103 A tricolour and star with a sacred heart emblem was used by the *Collège Sacré-Coeur* student band at Caraquet, and similar flags were displayed in southwest Nova Scotia during the early 1920s. Photos P38/161, P38/225, P38/245, Eudists Collection, PANB; and *L’Évangéline*, 24 August 1922. The tricolour and star with a Virgin Mary was described in *L’Évangéline*, 21 May 1908; and in an article from *Le Soleil de Paris*, reprinted in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 29 July 1909.

104 *L’Évangéline*, 6 April 1905, 23 August 1916; *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 13 August 1908; *Le Courrier des Provinces Maritimes*, 24 October 1889. For additional interpretations of the blue-white-red colour scheme, see *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 25 June 1903, 1 September 1910; *L’Évangéline*, 21 May 1908 and 22 August 1923.

during the 1950s and pledged a “combats intense pour la sauvegarde et la promotion de l'étendard acadien”,¹⁰⁵ but this resurrection was immediately succeeded by the rise of a radical Acadian youth movement during the rebellious sixties, which boded ill for traditional nationalism and its primary symbol. The new militants substituted socio-economic concerns for many of the old cultural preoccupations,¹⁰⁶ and in so doing they subjected the Acadian flag to a run of intense criticism not unlike the waves of criticism 60 and 70 years earlier, except that the flag was no longer considered too radical, but now not radical enough.¹⁰⁷ Reviled as a product of the reactionary renaissance-era elite, the tricolour and star was literally dragged through the mud: a youth *ralliement* at Collège St.-Joseph actually “retired” it;¹⁰⁸ a band of neo-nationalist students in Moncton mocked it by adding the hammer and sickle to the blue stripe;¹⁰⁹ and in the 1970s, an annual convention of the *Parti Acadien* briefly considered a proposal to replace it with a less “colonial” design.¹¹⁰

In the final analysis, however, the majority of Acadians stood by their traditional banner, paying little heed to the claim that it was an embarrassing anachronism. The revisionist movement failed because its literal interpretation of the flag's symbolism had little resonance among the Acadian elite, which preferred a more elastic and abstract rendering of the flag's various elements. The Acadian tricolour is presently a symbol of France only indirectly — as the gold star is similarly an indirect symbol of religion — because these elements are part of the overall Acadian heritage. The flag is better understood as a symbol of that heritage as a whole, especially of the century of evolution and development since it was

105 Jean Paul Hauteceouer, “L'Acadie: Idéologies et Société”, Ph.D. thesis, l'Université Laval, 1972, pp. 190, 199; and *Debates of the New Brunswick Legislature*, 1984, p. 425. In 1953, *l'Association Acadienne d'Education* actually distributed ten thousand tricolour and star flags. *L'Évangéline*, 20 May, 22 September 1953.

106 Pierre Poulin, “L'Acadien à la recherche d'une Acadie”, *Relations*, 371 (1972), p. 137.

107 Hauteceouer, “L'Acadie: Idéologies et Société”, p. 480. Nanciellen Davis also suggests that this rejection of traditional national symbols during the 1960s constituted — in part — an attempt by Québécois-influenced elites to disintegrate the cultural boundaries between Acadia and French Quebec. Nanciellen Davis, *Ethnicity and Ethnic Group Persistence in an Acadian Village in Maritime Canada* (New York, 1985), p. 26.

108 *L'Évangéline*, 9 April 1966; Léon Thériault, *La Question du Pouvoir en Acadie* (Moncton, 1982), p. 34; and Léger, “Centenaire du drapeau acadien — Un historique”, pp. 140-1.

109 *Moncton Daily Times*, 28 February 1968; *L'Évangéline*, 28 February, 20 March 1968.

110 *L'Évangéline*, 30 April 1979; interview with André Dumont, 28 August 1986; and letter to the author from Professor Léon Thériault, 20 October 1983. The alternate proposal was blue with three gold stars in a diagonal, representing the three principal regions of Acadia (i.e., Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast New Brunswick). It was designed and promoted by André Dumont, a founding member of *le Parti Acadien*.

adopted and through which it flew; it is “le lien entre l’ancien et le nouveau...entre ce qu’il y avait de traditionnel dans notre communautés et le nouvelle culture que l’on voit se développer dans notre communauté acadienne”.¹¹¹ In short, the symbols may be of distant foreign origin and may draw little upon Acadian folklore — which probably explains the flag’s initial lack of appeal — but the flag itself has now attained a true patriotic and historic value simply because of its longevity of usage.

In fact, the theme of adaptability is the one major thread which weaves its way throughout the flag’s entire history. Originally the flag was chosen as a mark of pragmatic association with French Canada and with modern France, and was thereby a means of partially compensating for the earlier choice of the Assumption, a symbol which had signified the exact opposite — a distinct Acadian identity independent of the Québécois, and a romantic affection not for modern France, but for the France of a bygone era. In other words, the flag emerged as a compromise between modernism, represented in the tricolour, and religious isolationism, represented by the star, although the force of the tricolour was considerably dulled by its association with the safely anti-radical nationalism of the St.-Jean Baptiste movement. Despite the non-confrontational intent of the flag’s adoption, however, it still became an emblem of Acadian particularism when French Canada itself moved away from the tricolour, and the Acadian elite subsequently refused to follow the same path. At this point, the compromise inherent in the flag became a paradox, and some of the best minds among the Acadian elite set to work to demonstrate that the flag actually was *not* the “soiled” tricolour which had originally been lauded as a means of identification with other French communities, but which had since become a source of embarrassment. This adaptability of interpretation is certainly not a strange or particular phenomena. As David Kertzer notes, few national symbols are cast in stone — as the character of a national elite changes over the course of time, it constantly redefines national symbolism in order to justify its own privileges by suggesting and re-suggesting an appropriate self-definition for its followers.¹¹² Thus, what was once religious can become secular, and what was once cosmopolitan can become particularist.

One must finally wonder, however, whether the metamorphic power of the tricolour and star will lead it over the rough terrain of the future, or whether its powers of adaptation are limited. One of the risks in adopting particularist

111 *Debates of the New Brunswick Legislature*, 1984, p. 437. A 1970 press article on the national emblems noted: “Ces symboles représentent de longues années d’endurance et de souffrance. Nous nous devons, je crois de respecter ceux qui ont défriché notre route”. *L’Évangéline*, 14 August 1970.

112 Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p. 175.

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symbols was that it implicitly encouraged an already strong trend for French Canada to withdraw into itself, perhaps ceasing its advocacy of the French fact beyond the boundaries of Fortress Quebec. This tendency — if accentuated — could face Acadians with a rather stark choice between an increased risk of assimilation into English Canada or a return to the old strategy of the St. Jean Baptiste movement — fusion with French Canada. Either course would leave Acadian particularism — and its primary symbol — without much field for future development.