

[Page 58 - Gobineau: Cape Breton's People, 1859](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 54](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1990/6/1

lies. As for herds and chattel, everything was seized. Most of these unfortunate died in poverty without having been able to rejoin their families. The village of Grandpré was utterly destroyed. This sad event has lost, in the Nova Scotian tradition, any national significance; it has become instead a religious account. The anger is not directed at the English because they are English, rather it is because the English are heretics and persecutors of the faith. The account belongs just as much to the Irish as to the Acadians. A third of the population of the colony maintains the tale, repeats it, comments it with fervour, and all the details that are now added to it are not always historically correct because it already has the quality of a myth. For instance, among other things it is said that when the British soldiers, after having forced the entire population aboard the ships, tried to enter the houses to pillage them, they found on the doorsteps dogs crazed by anger, their fur bristling, barring their entrance. They were only able to get in these empty houses after having massacred their last faithful defenders. These accounts, dear to Catholics without distinction of origins, have been spread by them throughout North America. The sufferings of the martyrs of Grandpré have become the shared glory of all the faithful, and it is from their own mouths that Longfellow gleaned the details on which he based the poem *Evangeline*, far superior by subject matter and slightly less inferior by its art to Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea*, for Longfellow's sources for his celebrated poem were not the Acadians themselves but a French philosopher, the abbe Guillaume-Thomas Raynal. 1711-1798. who published, in 1770. a hugely successful four-volume *Histoire Philosophique des Établissements...européens dans les deux Indes*. Thomas Haiburton. who was very sympathetic to the Acadians. was also a prime source of information for the American poet who never came to Nova Scotia, although it is said that he might have been a shareholder in one of the Cape Breton coal mining operations.' The preparations for our return (to France), after having brought us to St.-Pierre, also brought us back to Sydney. There we spent a few days looking at a scenery that Fall was beginning to colour in red tints of every imaginable hue. The Indians had come down from the interior in greater numbers than we had ever seen, and their wigwams stretched into the nearby woods. Groups of these good people circulated in the streets, selling their baskets and begging a little, which gave us the opportunity to meet an important person named Gougou who was nothing less than the last representative of the ancient royal house of the Micmacs. It is said that his compatriots hold him in very high esteem. He knows what deference is due to the blood from which he is issued; however, he is currently tormented by a critically difficult financial situation. Our introduction was facilitated by a few cents, which were offered him to buy tobacco, and which he accepted with alacrity. Later, he was moved to accept several loads of gunpowder and lead which he used to bring us partridges. Of his entire band, this prince was unquestionably the most slovenly in his dress. In truth, he constantly wore an extremely threadbare black frock coat, torn in more than one spot and to which there was one solitary button. His pants were in the most



total disarray; his hat was t)Ottoless. Gougou, a widower now for several years, wanted to remarry but he admitted that it was difficult to find a suitable party since all he owned consisted in his hat, his pants and his black frock coat. It was aimed that the prestige of his birth was not enough to allow him to make a rich marriage within his tribe and that, therefore, it is feared that the Micmac royal family will die with him. We spent a few more very agreeable days in the good and hospitable Sydney. Mr. B(ourinot) wished to emulate the example of the Gassen- fIH a few months previously, and surmount the difficulties associated in giving a ball. Despite the difficulties, he tried valiantly and succeeded beyond the wildest dreams. His orchestra, and that was the central difficulty, was far superior to the one we had managed to contrive on board. It was composed of two very sleepy fiddlers. When one quadrille was finished, someone shook them forcefully by the arm, then they stopped playing. A second shake and an indication of what was need? ed, and they started again. Howev? er, they only woke up for dinner and went back to sleep immediately af- tenwards when, once again, their in- stments were placed in their hands. Since this ball was the last social occasion for the general staff of the | Gassendi it was prolonged as late as could be. It was far into the night | when embari