

New Brunswick

(The following poem celebrates the place names and natural beauty of the province.)

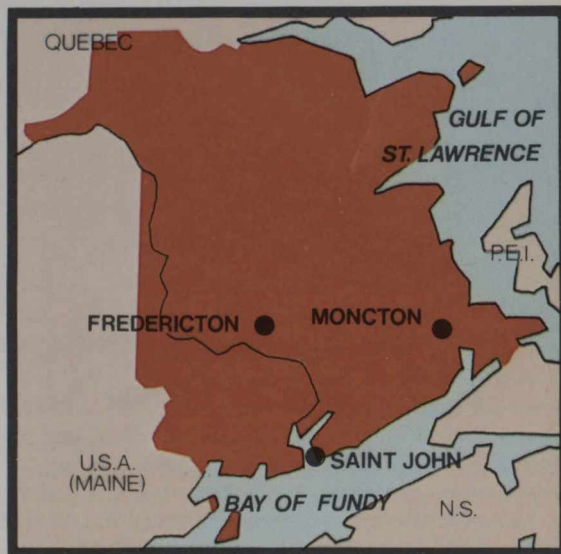
*Let others sing loudly of Saca
of Quoddy and Tattamagouche
of Kennenecosis and Quaco
of Merigomishe and Buctouche
of Nashwaak and Magaquadaque
or Memmerimammericook—
There's none like the Skoodoowabskookis
Excepting the Skoodoowabstook!
James DeMille, 1870*

People

New Brunswick has a significant French-speaking population—thirty-five per cent of its 701,000 people are Acadians—and this has had a significant effect on its laws, economy and culture.

In 1966 Louis Robichaud, the first Acadian to be elected Premier, eliminated county governments and divided their powers. The province took over education, public health and other social services and the administration of justice; and the towns assumed such matter-of-fact responsibilities as supplying water, removing snow and putting out fires. The changes improved the health and educational services in the poorer counties on the north and east coasts where most of the Acadians live.

In 1969 the Official Languages Act made French an official provincial language as well as English, and the Acadians achieved something like parity. There are now public schools with French as the language of instruction. (Since Quebec made French the sole official language of that province, New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada.)



French speakers have lived in what is now New Brunswick since it was part of Acadia, founded in 1604 by the French and destroyed during the Seven Years' War by the British. Most of the settlers were expelled, many going far south to Louisiana. Some stayed in the area, escaping to the back country, and others returned when things calmed down.

Acadians are distinct from the Québécois, differing in their points of origin and times of settlement, in the French they speak and in their traditional occupations (the Québécois farmed the rich St. Lawrence valley; the Acadians were fishermen and farmers of drained marshes). They even differ in their principal feast days: the Québécois celebrate St-Jean-Baptiste Day, the Acadians the Feast of the Assumption, the ascent of the Blessed Mother to heaven. (Mary is the traditional patron of fishermen and other farers of the sea.)

In 1881 the Acadian leaders met at Memramcook where they decided to make efforts to preserve their own culture and remain distinct from the French Canadians in Quebec. Some eighty years later Premier Robichaud reaffirmed the Acadians' separate sense of destiny.

Robichaud, a Liberal, was succeeded by Richard Hatfield, a Conservative, in 1970. Hatfield is still in office and the senior elected official sitting without interruption in Canada. He is not an Acadian, but he has shown a positive appreciation of the French-Canadian point of view. In 1970, when René Lévesque's Parti Québécois first ran candidates in Quebec, Hatfield made a personal reconnaissance tour of that province. The *Atlantic Insight* said Hatfield "has stood out like a beacon of broadminded reason" whenever relations between French and English speakers are officially discussed. His daily concerns, however, focus more on economics.