

CHAPTER THREE

THE MIQUELON ISLANDS, 1763—1793

1. *First Settlement*

At the peace treaty of Paris in 1763, which ended the war between England and France, the tiny islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, off the coast of Newfoundland, were all that King Louis XVI could save from the wreckage of the immense French colonial empire in North America. At the request of the French government, the Holy See, in 1765, separated the islands from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec and reorganized them into a Prefecture, entrusted to the Holy Ghost Fathers.^{1*} Father James Girard received his appointment as first Prefect Apostolic of the new jurisdiction, and Father John Manach was to accompany him as a missionary.

Immediately after the signing of the peace treaty, France initiated steps to colonize the islands with Acadian refugees.⁵ A first group of three hundred and fifty went before the end of the year. Other groups followed in rapid succession, including many who made their way from Nova Scotia.⁶ Soon the little islands became so overcrowded that the government made every effort to induce part of their inhabitants to settle in Guiana, to return to France, or even to America and Nova Scotia.

^{1*} Although the Abbot of Isle Dieu had notified the Bishop of Quebec that these islands now depended immediately on the Holy See,² a 1778 letter of Father de Villars, successor to the Abbot as Vicar General of Quebec, states that the Bishop had specifically authorized him to send priests to the Miquelon Islands.³ The French government, which did not want the islands to depend on a bishop in foreign territory, quickly pointed out that it is "the Superior of the Holy Ghost Seminary whom the King had authorized to present priests for these missions and that these priests receive their faculties from the Holy See"⁴ and not from Quebec.

¹ Le Président... de la Marine à l'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu, 7 juin 1765: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 122, 190(150).

² L'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu à Mgr Briand, 17 avril 1766: Arch. Qu. 1937-38, p. 208.

³ Le Président... de la Marine à M. de Villars, 11 février 1778: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 164, 48(13).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 221 f.

⁶ Murdoch II, p. 442.

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To his great surprise, the Abbot of Isle Dieu learned that in 1763 two ex-members of the suppressed Society of Jesus, Father Bonnecamp and Father Paul Ardiliers, had accompanied the first governor of the islands and were exercising their functions among the new settlers⁷ without having the necessary ecclesiastical authorization.^{2*} They withdrew, however, when they were informed of the fact that the islands had been transferred to the control of the Spiritans,⁹ and the Abbot recommended them to the Bishop of Quebec for service in his diocese.¹⁰

In July 1765, Father Manach^{3*} and Father Girard sailed from France to assume the spiritual care of the new Acadian colony.¹¹ A furious storm drove the ship off its course and it finally landed in Martinique. On the way back to France in January of the following year, Father Manach died.¹⁵ His companion was so exhausted

^{2*} All they had were faculties for travel at sea obtained at their port of embarkation. In 1767, the Holy See regularized the acts which they had performed improperly.⁸

^{3*} Both priests had planned in 1762 to return to Canada by way of Louisiana.¹² The next year Father Manach had tried in vain to return to Miramichi, New Brunswick, to resume work there among the refugee Acadians and his Micmacs Indians.¹³ His appointment to the Miquelon Islands likewise was for the avowed intention of facilitating his return to Acadia.¹⁴

⁷ Paul Hubert, *Les îles de la Madeleine*, Rimouski, 1926, pp. 227 ff. Cf. le Président... de la Marine à l'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu, 8 août 1766: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 125, 297(168).

⁸ David, "Les Spiritains à Saint-Pierre et Miquelon," B.R.H. 1929, pp. 437 f.

⁹ Le Président... de la Marine à M. Dangeac, 7 juin 1765: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 121, 11bis(124).

¹⁰ See footnote 2.

¹¹ L'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu à M. Le Guerne, 4 juin 1767: Arch. Qu. 1937-38, p. 236.

¹² Le Président... de la Marine à l'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu, 28 février 1762 and 7 nov. 1762: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 115-1, 54v(41) and 284(287).

¹³ Lettre de M. Manach à ?, 4 mars 1763: C.F.D.I., 2, pp. 143 f.; Robins à Petitpas, 10 juin 1763: *N.S., A, vol. 71, pp. 57 ff. (*B.M. add 19071, f. 199); Wilmot to Secretary of State, 10 Dec., 1763: *N.S., A, vol. 72, pp. 128 ff. (*CO-217: 20, M104).

¹⁴ Le Président... de la Marine à M. Dangeac, 17 mai 1765: *Arch. Col., C11B, vol. 121, 9(119).

¹⁵ David, *art. cit.*, p. 438.

that he had to abandon his journey to the Miquelon Islands.^{4*}

In 1766, Holy Ghost Seminary sent two substitutes, Father Julien Becquet and Father Xavier Paradis, as Prefect and Vice-Prefect Apostolic, respectively.¹⁸ As usual, the Abbot of Isle Dieu was full of praise for these Spiritans. He described Father Becquet to the Bishop of Quebec as "learned, strict and firm, but at the same time prudent and wise, moderate when necessary. He will need all these qualities in dealing with the Governor who is not exactly very sociable and, I believe, in possession of few clear and solid principles."¹⁹ Father Paradis, the Abbot continued, is "a man of great virtue and piety, but unfortunately his strength and health are not up to his zeal, his eagerness, and his activity in all kinds of good works. I feel that he will overwork himself."²⁰ Fortunately the local commander of Miquelon Island "likes him very much and takes good care of him, for otherwise he would simply go on living in the greatest privation."²¹

The Abbot apparently knew whereof he spoke when he forecast that Father Becquet would need all his outstanding qualities in dealing with the Governor.²² The control he exercised in religious matters as representative

^{4*} In 1767, Father Girard was planning to go to work among the Acadians of Prince Edward Island, but his expectancy did not materialize.¹⁶ The Marquis of Pérusse invited him, in 1774, to become pastor of the Acadians whom he planned to settle on his estates. Judging that the conditions laid down by the Marquis would not make it possible for the wretched deportees to re-establish themselves, he rejected the offer, since he did not wish to "dwell in a castle" and witness once more the untold sufferings of these poor people in their endless peregrinations without hope.¹⁷

¹⁶ L'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu à Mgr Briand, 18 février 1767 and 19 février 1767: Arch. Qu. 1937-38, pp. 214 and 219.

¹⁷ M Girard au marquis de Pérusse, 14 déc. 1774: Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

¹⁸ L'Abbé de l'Isle Dieu à Mgr Briand, 17 avril 1769: Arch. Qu. 1937-38, p. 208; du même au nonce apostolique, 5 juin 1769: *ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See footnote 15.

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of the State was so strict that the priest found it almost impossible to fulfill his functions and to organize parishes among the new settlers. The arrival of a third priest, Father John (2) Bouguet in 1774, gave him an opportunity to return to Europe with the intention of submitting his troubles to the Holy See. When this plan could not be carried out, he resigned as Prefect Apostolic.^{5*} Meanwhile the Acadian population made valiant but often futile efforts to procure a living on the islands through fishing and agriculture.²³ The difficulties were so great that many of them had to leave while others subsisted precariously on government support. The islands, moreover, were constantly burdened by having to provide for Acadians escaping from their exile in the States or their misery in Nova Scotia and adjacent lands, and, paradoxically, others who were hopefully returning to the land of their birth. Gradually, however, through persevering hard work, about fourteen hundred managed to settle in hopeful permanence on the islands. With their own hands they built not only their humble dwellings, but also their fishing boats and the necessary installations for drying their catch.

2. Deportation and Return

With the greatest reluctance Great Britain had allowed France to retain these little islands. Although they wholly lacked fortifications and were therefore militarily useless in a war, the British navy kept a close watch on them. When war between France and England broke out again in 1778, a unit of the British fleet appeared and captured the defenseless islands. After sending the French governor and his "army" of less than three dozen men back to France, the conqueror again proceeded systematically to destroy what the poor refugees had built up so laboriously. More than 460 dwellings and fisherman's huts, 200 storage sheds and other structures went up in flames.

^{5*} Father Cassiet, a former missionary of Prince Edward Island, was destined to become his successor. After unforeseen difficulties first delayed his appointment, the American War of Independence (1778-1783) made it impossible for him to depart.²⁴

²³ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 226 ff.

²⁴ David, *Les missionnaires . . .*, p. 46.

Once more the Acadians, who seemed doomed to be "settlers" forever, saw themselves deported under wretched conditions. Father Paradis and his companion shared their fate. Many of them died on board the ships which took them to France and others succumbed soon after. By 1780, only 780 of the deportees remained, waiting for a chance to return to their little island home.²⁵

The Treaty of Versailles (1783) which restored the islands to France, provided the necessary opportunity to resettle the tiny archipelago. Father Paradis returned along with many of the former Acadian settlers. Gradually the hardy fishermen rebuilt their establishments during the seven years of peace which followed. Holy Ghost Seminary reinforced the religious service of the islands by sending Father John Longueville, who became Prefect Apostolic about 1784, Father John Allain, and Father Francis Le Jamtel.²⁶ On the eve of the French Revolution about 1200 people, of whom 514 were Acadians, lived peacefully on the islands.²⁷

3. *The French Revolution*

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, the government imposed a constitutional oath upon the clergy. Because the formula of the oath amounted to a kind of schism, the Holy See did not permit the priests to comply with this revolutionary demand.²⁸ Father Allain and Father Le Jamtel courageously refused to take the oath and fled with most of their parishioners to the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.²⁹ Left alone in the Miquelon Islands, Father Longueville, the Prefect, must have been in an agony of indecision. If he followed the same course as his two confreres, the remaining population would have been left without any priest. After long reflection, he thought himself morally justified in submitting to the oath. Although, ~~no doubt~~, ^{probably} he took

²⁵ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 233 f.

²⁶ See footnote 24.

²⁷ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, p. 237.

²⁸ David, "Les Spiritains à Saint-Pierre et Miquelon," B.R.H. 1929, p. 439.

²⁹ Robert Perret, *La géographie de Terre-Neuve*, Paris, 1913, p. 299; Can. Arch. 1895, State Papers, Cape Breton, p. 44.

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it with all the reservations which many priests in France added to the formula, it remains nonetheless true that his action in this respect was reprehensible. Meanwhile it enabled him to stay in the islands and to minister to the spiritual needs of the people.³⁰

At first, the Revolution had very little effect upon the islands.³¹ Everyone rejoiced, of course, when the Paris government announced that the loans made to the settlers did not have to be repaid, but otherwise the Revolution scarcely caused a ripple. Like everyone else, the members of the local Security Committee faithfully attended Mass and even Sunday Vespers, instead of following the example of their Parisian model in compiling lists of people to be executed. This peaceful development, however, was not to the liking of the seven young men who had constituted a committee of "Friends of the Revolution."³² The guillotine fell all over France; the Miquelon Islands, they thought, should be no less revolutionary than the other parts of France. "The colony," they said, "will never be peaceful unless some throats are cut here too."³³

Father Longueville, who had become a member of the local General Assembly, and Commander Danseville did their best to quiet the appeal for victims made by these "Friends of the Revolution."³⁴ When the young men persisted in their demands, the Commander had them deported to France. The home government, however, disapproved this deportation and returned the "victims of the unpatriotic aristocrat" to the Islands. It is not difficult to imagine whose heads would have rolled had they become masters there.³⁵

Meanwhile a conflict broke out in the local General Assembly relative to voting age.³⁶ In France, the Revolutionary government fixed the age at twenty-five, but this

³⁰ David, *art. cit.*, p. 438.

³¹ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 237 ff.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁴ Perret, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

³⁵ See footnote 33.

³⁶ Perret, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

requirement seemed too rigid to some of the Miquelonnians. In the ensuing discussion, the Assembly members on the Gospel side opposed those on the Epistle side (the meeting took place in the parish church) and wanted to lower the age requirement to twenty-one. Suddenly someone proposed that they reject the authority of the National Assembly in Paris and proclaim that the laws of Miquelon were made only in Miquelon. When the President of the local Assembly concurred, a hastily proposed law was accepted to this effect. Thus the little islands had proclaimed, perhaps unwittingly, their independence from France (April 11, 1793).³⁷

Unfortunately for this new republic of ninety-three square miles, at this time war broke out again between France and England.³⁸ The British apparently did not recognize the independent new republic, and sent a fleet to occupy the islands. Since the local army of forty-six officers and men was no match for the five English ships with more than three hundred men, Danseville surrendered unconditionally to the superior enemy.³⁹ After deporting the commander and all non-residents to Halifax, General Edgell, the British chief, left a garrison of a hundred and sixty men to keep the local population in a state of virtual imprisonment.⁴⁰ Eighteen months later, everyone not wanting to settle in Nova Scotia was deported to Halifax and from there to the Channel islands of Jersey and Guernesey. It was the fifth deportation for many of them. Behind them rose again the smoke of their burning homes, wrecked and destroyed to prevent France from making use of the islands.

As for Father Longueville, in 1793, Bishop John Francis Hubert of Quebec authorized him to exercise his priestly ministry in Nova Scotia. However, when the prelate heard that the priest had taken the constitutional

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 300 f.

³⁸ Lauvrière, *op. cit.*, II, p. 239.

³⁹ Ogilvie to Secretary of State, 18 May, 1793: Can. Arch. 1894, pp. 484 f.

⁴⁰ MaCarmick to Ogilvie, 10 Feb., 1793: Can. Arch. 1895, State Papers, Cape Breton, p. 49.

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oath, he withdrew ^{his} permission.⁴¹ In November of the same year, Father Longueville was still in the Miquelon Islands with the people who had not yet been deported. He probably shared their fate the following year.⁴² Doubtless he recognized his mistake in taking the oath, for later he appears in France as an honorary Canon of the Rheims Cathedral. He died in 1820, at the age of sixty-seven.^{6*}

** When, in 1814, the Treaty of Paris restored the Miquelon Islands to France, the Holy Ghost Fathers again assumed charge of providing priests for the Acadians and other deportees of 1793 who returned to this colony. For several years, the critical condition of the Congregation and Seminary of the Holy Ghost prevented them from staffing the islands fully with their own priests. (For the religious history of the islands after 1816, see the author's book, *The Spiritans*, pp. 227 f. and 358 ff.)

⁴¹ Mgr Hubert à M. Jones, 6 juillet 1793: *Arch. Archd. Qu., Reg. d. L., vol. 2, 64.

⁴² David, *Les missionnaires . . .*, p. 47.