

Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park
Aulac, New Brunswick
Canada



Issued under the authority of the
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Original Earthen Bastion of French Period

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At the middle of the 18th century the dividing line between French and British influence in Acadia lay along the Missaguash River, one of the four rivers that drain the southern slope of the Isthmus of Chignecto.

In 1710 New England militiamen and British regulars had captured the French Port Royal, thus in one engagement effecting the conquest of the Nova Scotia mainland. The Treaty of Utrecht, concluded three years later, formally transferred Acadia to Great Britain.

But what was Acadia? The British hopefully believed parts of what is now New Brunswick were included. The French, confident that they would soon win back the Nova Scotia mainland, could not consider such a broad definition of the geographical limits of Acadia. They were determined to hold as much ground as they could. Time seemed to be in their favor. Against the weak and ill-disciplined garrison at Annapolis Royal and the few detachments occupying isolated posts in the peninsula, the French could send Indian raiding parties. While the British struggled against the harassments of the Indians, the population of Acadia—overwhelmingly French—could be provoked to at least passive resistance against their alien conquerors. French power preserved at the Fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island and at the settlements of New France along the St. Lawrence could be transmitted by land and by sea to the narrow neck of land at Chignecto where it would seal off British expansion eastward and provide moral and material aid that would swing the uncommitted Acadian “neutrals” to the side of France.

The Isthmus of Chignecto had been settled by the French since about 1672, when Jacques Bourgeois, surgeon and fur trader, sold his farm at Port Royal and, in company with two sons-in-law, founded a new colony which became known as the Bourgeois Settlement. It was later renamed Beaubassin, a name which had apparently been applied as early as 1612 to the region, and after 1676 to the seignury at Chignecto granted to the Sieur de la Vallière, an explorer and trader.

The Acadians of Beaubassin accommodated well to the French and British struggle in the New World. When the British captured Port Royal in 1690, Bourgeois, who had remained the leader of the settlement even while de la Vallière was its seigneur, went to Port Royal and promised the victorious British admiral that he and his people would be obedient to British rule. He in turn received a written pledge that Beaubassin would never be molested while the British ruled.

This pledge was displayed to the Boston Indian fighter, Captain Ben Church, when he descended on Beaubassin in 1696 with 250 colonial rangers and 150 Indians. However, this was less convincing than the presence of an official French order in the settlement's chapel. Taking this as prima facie evidence of disloyalty to the British, the colonials burned the chapel; they had already destroyed some of the homes and slaughtered the livestock of the people of Beaubassin. Again in 1704 Church returned on a punitive expedition to Beaubassin and after meeting armed resistance, left 20 homes in ashes and the carcasses of 120 cattle lying in the fields.

Except for the Church raids, Beaubassin prospered. A portage of only a league between the Missaguash and Baie Verte made crossing of the isthmus an easy matter. Baie Verte had developed into an active centre of trade for the Acadians. A fishery had been established there as long ago as 1619, and now they travelled to trade with the fishermen. Some Acadians settled there and soon from Baie Verte

passed furs to Quebec and provisions to Louisbourg. One of the earliest settlements founded in the growing Beaubassin colony was located on a dominating point of the highest of the three ridges that crossed the Tantramar marshes. The settlement was named *Pointe à Beauséjour* perhaps from its attractive location. From its high site, it overlooked the Missaguash River and the ridge two miles to the east, to which the name of Beaubassin was eventually restricted.

Chignecto was revealed to the British as a base for French military operations during the War of the Austrian Succession and the people of Beaubassin came under suspicion of giving aid and support to the enemy. In 1744, not long after word of France's declaration of war on Great Britain had reached North America, a band of Micmacs surrounded the British fort at Annapolis Royal and their leader, a priest of the order of the Holy Ghost, demanded the surrender of the British garrison. This was the first appearance in a military role of the Abbé Jean Louis Le Loutre, who had come to Nova Scotia in 1738 and, until now, had enjoyed good relations with the British administration. Le Loutre's excursion against Annapolis Royal, although profitless because the British commander out-bluffed him, implicated him in the French plan to re-conquer Acadia, and eventually also the people of Chignecto because of his contacts with them during the war and residence there afterwards.

Also, for part of the war Beaubassin was actually turned into a French military base. Armed parties of Indians and *coureurs-de-bois* assembled here for raids on the British settlements. Pushed by the militant Le Loutre, the parish priest of Beaubassin, Father Germain, worked on his flock, urging them to revoke their allegiance to British authority and join their compatriots in the struggle to drive Protestant, English-speaking influence from Nova Scotia. Beaubassin was an important base of the Sieur de Ramezay during his campaign of over a year in Acadia, and during that time it served as a starting point for a number of French expeditions against the British, the most notable being the bloody night attack in 1747 on 500 New England troops billeted at Grand Pré. It may even have been the actual location of the "Fort of 9 Guns" he built at "Bay Vert" by 1747.

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the war left the decision on the boundaries of Acadia to a commission and while the French and British commissioners argued their claims the rival forces in Acadia consolidated their areas of influence. The strategic importance of Chignecto was evident to both sides. Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts, one of the British members on the boundary commission, believed British settlement of Chignecto was "absolutely necessary" and advocated "a regular Fort strongly garrisoned between Bay Verte and Beaubassin."

In the spring of 1750 Major Charles Lawrence landed on the Beauséjour side of the Missaguash with 400 men, with orders to "chuse the most advantageous situation for a Fort at Chignecto and to throw up what works you can for the present to secure it." The British commander was met by the Chevalier de la Corne, who had been sent to Beaubassin late in 1749 to establish posts at Shepody, Memramcook and Petitcodiac, and in addition had taken up a position on the Beauséjour ridge and "picketted" it. La Corne pointed out that British troops could not be landed on this part of the isthmus, as all the country on the west side of the Missaguash River was French territory. While the two officers argued, the tide went out and Lawrence, conscious that de la Corne was too strongly entrenched to be driven away, realized also that if he crossed to the east side, he would be separated from his ships grounded by low tide off the French shore.

Meanwhile, Le Loutre and Germain had seen the opportunity to force the Acadians of Beaubassin out of their homes in British territory and place them in the

French camp. Le Loutre had sent letters and Germain had gone through Beaubassin ordering the Acadians to collect what possessions they could carry and cross the Missaguash into French territory. Apprehensive about the intention of the English soldiers in the bay (frequent British warnings against supporting the French had raised the fear of deportation), the Acadians had left Beaubassin. Now they had gone, Micmacs sent by Le Loutre were destroying Beaubassin by fire as Lawrence landed, so that nothing but scorched earth would be left for him and his soldiers east of the river. Constructing a fort in such a scene of devastation and desolation would have been hopeless. There were now no dwellings to shelter his men, no source of provisions, no labouring force left to employ. Lawrence embarked when the tide came in and left the wasteland of Beaubassin.

In September he returned with a stronger force of several hundred men, equipped with all needed to erect a fort and maintain themselves. Lawrence made no attempt to land along the French side of the Missaguash, but nevertheless the French and their Indian allies opened fire on the incoming boats from a position behind a defensive dike built by Le Loutre west of the river. The British commander leapt into one of the boats and led the way into the shore. Then, with his men behind him, holding their fire till the last minute, he boldly charged the snipers, driving them away. Lawrence encamped and threw up his fort on the ridge of Beaubassin.

It consisted of a quadrilateral palisade strengthened with earth and in honour of its founder was named Fort Lawrence. Across the Missaguash, on the Beauséjour ridge, stood a French stockade fort ordered two months after Lawrence's landing. "Fort Beauséjour" consisted in 1751 of an unsupported wooden palisade with five bastions, a men's barracks and an officers' barracks with clay chimneys, a storehouse, a guard house, and a powder magazine. The original entrance was from the east.

The construction of Fort Beauséjour proceeded slowly and painfully, partly because Le Loutre had cornered much of the local labour supply for the building of a great dike. It was soon planned to strengthen it greatly, by building up, around and over the picketing, massive sodded earth ramparts, containing timber-framed casemates and having turrets at the points of the bastions; by digging a moat 16 feet wide and seven feet deep outside these earthworks, and adding a glacis and another palisade outside that again; by placing a demilune or triangular work in the moat in front of the east entrance; and by adding a gate tower and a bigger, two-storey barracks inside the fort. However, Vergor Duchambon, one of its commandants, reported in 1754, that it was still in a weak state. He said bastions and moat were unfinished, the storehouse in need of rebuilding, and the officers' and men's quarters also already in bad condition. The new barracks was incomplete, one powder magazine badly placed, the curtain ramparts were very weak and the water supply of the fort so muddy that drinking water had to be brought by cart from some distance. There were now a bakery and hospital outside the fort.

Evidently despairing that the fort would ever withstand a siege the Governor of Canada instructed Commandant Duchambon and Le Loutre to strike at the British on the isthmus. A copy of this message was passed by the traitor Thomas Pichon to the British, and helped to give a reason for the attack on Fort Beauséjour which Lawrence and Governor Shirley of Massachusetts had been urging for some time. A force of 2000 volunteers was raised in New England by Shirley and put under Lieut. Cols. John Winslow and George Scott, and sent to Nova Scotia to join an expedition led by Lieut. Col. Robert Monckton.

The expedition against Beauséjour landed near Fort Lawrence on June 2, 1755, unexpected by the French and unperceived because of the fog. After a day's preparations, the attack was mounted on the 4th. The New Englanders and 270 regulars of the Fort Lawrence garrison, "with all our guns Looking very Bright and Souldier

like," advanced along the main road to Fort Beauséjour, a road which the French had flooded by opening the dikes. An advance guard of 60 riflemen led by Captain Nathan Adams formed the spearhead.

The first objective was the river crossing known as Buot's Bridge, named after Buhot, an Acadian settler. The bridge and a "sorry little redoubt of insecure and ill-spaced pickets" had been dismantled by the French, but on the western side of the Missaguash a breastwork and log blockhouse mounting two swivel cannon captured from an English ship had been put up instead to protect the approach to Fort Beauséjour.

Captain Adams and his men were within 300 yards of the river crossing when concentrated swivel and musket fire burst on them from about 400 yelling Indians, Acadians and French regulars, hidden behind the breastwork and lining the woods. The militia halted while British gunners dragged four 6-pounder cannons forward. In less than an hour, a well-aimed cannonade had set the blockhouse afire. Then, under cover of their cannon, a detachment completed a temporary bridge of heavy timbers across the river, and the infantry ran over it to storm and carry the barricade. A few lives were lost in this skirmish.

Having broken through the outer defences of Beauséjour, the troops pushed to within two miles of the French fort in the face of continual sniping from Indians and *coureurs-de-bois*. There they camped for the night. In the morning, they advanced cautiously a half-mile closer to the fort to reconnoitre the approaches. The only noteworthy incidents of the next two days were occasioned by Captain Sylvanus Cobb, the privateer and Indian-fighter of Fort Lawrence, sailing his sloop *York* up the Missaguash with supplies and rum while the French fired at him.

On June 8, Colonel Winslow took 300 men and moved to within 600 yards of Fort Beauséjour to select an artillery position. The French tried to drive the New Englanders off the hill they had occupied but Winslow held his ground until he was advised by Colonel Monckton to withdraw. On the same day, the New Englanders overpowered a French outpost on Tonge's Island in the marshes. An ensign from this force left the "island" that night, possibly to visit his wife, and was captured and taken to Fort Beauséjour.

Three days later Winslow returned to the high ground near the fort and drove the French off while Captain Adams reconnoitred the ground to the right of the fort, finding an abandoned cannon, a coach of one of the French officers, and other spoils. Again on June 12 New Englanders and regulars occupied the high ground that Winslow and his engineers had selected for artillery positions. All next day a detachment of 200 men dug trenches under steady fire from the fort and at night the position was ready to receive two 8-inch mortars.

The New Englanders and the French exchanged artillery fire for the next two days. One French shell put a mortar out of action and it was replaced the next day by a mortar of the same bore, as well as a heavy 13-inch mortar. Inside Fort Beauséjour the bombardment from the English mortars was shaking the confidence of the French defenders though casualties were light. The French artilleryman, Louis de Fiedmont, was professionally impressed by the force of the shells from the eight- and thirteen-inch mortars, so much so that he feared the famous "bombproof" shelter of the fort (which had over 10 feet of earth above it) would be destroyed. Hay, the captured English ensign was in this shelter, and he, like most of the French, thought he was safer there than anyplace else in the fort. The defenders worked hard at improvised additions to the fortifications, using bales and barrels full of earth; inflammable buildings were razed or unroofed, and the roof of the powder magazine covered with skins.

On June 16, the French and New Englanders resumed their furious exchange of fire. The "bombproof" shelter received a direct hit that killed Ensign Hay and French officers while they were breakfasting together. The damage to the "bombproof" brought great panic to the French fort. The Acadians and other civilians in the fort urged the commandant to surrender.

Duchambon sought the counsel of the officers and they too agreed that the fort could not long withstand the bombardment, particularly since most of them believed its powder magazine was more vulnerable to heavy mortar shells than the shelter had been. At about nine in the morning, a flag of truce was brought from the fort to the New Englanders' position and provisional articles of capitulation were drawn up and signed during the day. Early in the evening Monckton's regulars and Winslow's men marched into Fort Beauséjour.

Two days later Fort Gaspereau, a small picketed fort near Baie Verte, built about the same time as Beauséjour but in such poor shape that Winslow found "all things miserable to the last Degree" also surrendered to him, and the isthmus passed completely into the hands of the British. Fort Beauséjour was renamed Fort Cumberland in honour of the Duke of Cumberland and the former Fort Gaspereau was given the name of Monckton, the expedition's commander.

The New Englanders garrisoned Fort Cumberland until they were withdrawn to enforce the deportation of the Acadians in September, 1755. Four hundred of the Chignecto Acadians had already been shut up as prisoners in the fort (while most of the New Englanders live! in tents outside). The troops also made sorties from the fort to burn a number of Acadian villages. Colonel Winslow and some of his men took part in the expulsion of the Acadians of Minas, the events that are commemorated by Grand Pré National Historic Park in Nova Scotia.

The next year, Fort Lawrence at Beaubassin and Fort Monckton near Baie Verte were abandoned by the British and Fort Cumberland was left as the only garrisoned fort on the Chignecto Isthmus.

Shortly after the capture, the symmetrical system of advanced trenches which can still be seen to the eastward was built around the camp outside the fort. Contemporary plans show that these were not, as sometimes stated, the siege works, which were further east still in a spot where a three-storey blockhouse had been added by 1757. By this date, too, had been constructed a palisaded spur, joining the main works on their western side, which was nearly as large as the old part of the fort, and contained barracks and workshops, now gone, as well as a brick and stone powder magazine whose base still remains. The ditch and outer glacis of the main fort had been completed, and the ramparts further strengthened by fraises (picketing projecting horizontally from their faces) and by two arched stone casemates; one of these casemates is still complete and there are remains of the other by the curtain wall behind the magazine. But still in 1757 all the other buildings were of wood.

For several years after the fall of the fort guerilla warfare, mostly directed from the Saint John valley by the French officer Charles Des Champs de Boishebert, kept the garrison on the *qui vive*, and several detached parties suffered severe casualties. Among these were parties of wood-cutters scalped and slain near Fort Monckton in 1756 and at "Bloody Bridge" near Point de Bute in 1759. The former are commemorated by a monument at Port Elgin, on the site of Fort Gaspereau where the earthworks are clearly preserved.

The fall of Beauséjour was of little military consequence in the struggle between Britain and France in North America. Because France and Britain were not technically at war, the French military garrison of Beauséjour was not imprisoned and allowed to embark to Louisbourg. Le Loutre, whom the British and New Englanders would have liked to capture, escaped to Baie Verte and eventually reached Quebec. While returning to France, his ship was captured by the British and the fiery provocateur lodged in a Jersey Island prison for eight years. The French commandant at Beauséjour, Duchambon, two years later stood court-martial for his poor conduct of the defence of Beauséjour and was acquitted. He later was commandant of the post surprised when Wolfe's forces climbed to the Plains of Abraham in 1759.

Fort Cumberland was besieged again in 1776 by New England settlers on the isthmus who sympathized with the revolt of the American colonies and hoped to overthrow British authority in Nova Scotia. Colonel Jonathan Eddy, a Chignecto settler and the rebels' principal leader, who had brought reinforcements from New England and the Saint John River, called upon Colonel Joseph Goreham, the fort commandant, to surrender. Goreham refused and repelled two attacks, during which the buildings on the spur were burnt in an attempt to ignite the powder magazine. With ammunition running low, the commandant sent for aid. Two companies of soldiers and Royal Marines from Fort Edward at Windsor in Nova Scotia, answered the request for help and in a surprise night attack on the rear of Eddy's camp scattered the rebels. One of the young rebels captured was Richard John Uniacke, who in an interesting reversal of loyalty later became Attorney General and Chief Justice of Nova Scotia.

Before the end of the war the casemate near the powder magazine had fallen into ruin and the buildings on the spur were never rebuilt. Apparently some repairs were made to the fort at the beginning of the War of 1812; but it seems to have been abandoned soon after the war, and by the middle of the century farm buildings had been put up at the site.

Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park was established in 1926 to preserve the remains of the old fort. The pentagonal shape of the fort can still be traced clearly and one of the stone casemates built after the siege has been restored. North of the fort can be seen the system of entrenchments, raised around the camp at the same period.



Interior of Old Fort showing Loop-holed Curtain Wall



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