

Outstanding Universal Value

The Landscape of Grand Pré is an outstanding example and enduring model of the human capacity to overcome extraordinary natural challenges and cultural ordeals.

Outstanding Universal Value, for a UNESCO World Heritage Site, refers to a cultural and/or natural significance that is so exceptional as to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity.

For the Landscape of Grand Pré, the proposed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value refers to the following two UNESCO criteria:

1. It is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement that is representative of a human interaction with the environment.
2. It is a property that is tangibly associated with beliefs of outstanding universal significance.

The Landscape of Grand Pré is a dynamic agricultural landscape reclaimed from the sea. It is also a powerful symbolic landscape for the Acadians.

1. A landscape reclaimed from the sea

The Landscape of Grand Pré is the most intact agricultural dykeland in the world that uses an ingenious vernacular system to transform salt marsh into fertile farmland. “Vernacular” here means using locally available materials and traditions to meet local needs. At Grand Pré, the design and principles of building dykes and *aboiteaux* – the sluice system used to drain the dykelands – have not changed since the 1600s.

Holding back the highest tides in the world

Grand Pré lies on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, on the northeastern coast of North America. The dykes that protect the Grand Pré landscape are assailed by tides that have an average range of 12 metres. Twice a day, 100 billion tonnes of sea water flow in and out of the bay.

This churning volume of salt water presented a major challenge to the Acadians, who were the area’s first European settlers and first dyke builders. Yet they saw beyond the challenge to a major agricultural opportunity. If they could exclude the sea and allow rain and snow to wash the salt from the soil, they could claim the highly fertile tidal marshes for agriculture. In 1680, the Acadians began a series of dyke-building projects that continued for over 70 years.

Working collectively, they used natural drainage patterns and traditional dyking techniques to hold back the tides. They created extraordinarily fertile farmland and began a tradition of collective management.

Grand Pré was the largest and most prosperous of all Acadian-settled regions. Within decades of the Acadians' arrival, it became one of the most productive agricultural settlements in colonial North America.

The Grand Pré dykelands today

Today, the Acadians' spirit of collective management is maintained through the Grand Pré Marsh Body, the oldest known and most active marsh body in North America.

The Landscape of Grand Pré showcases the work of the Acadians and their successors, the New England Planters. More than 1,000 hectares of tidal marsh have been transformed into fertile farmland in one of the most challenging coastal environments in the world.

More than three centuries after the Acadians arrived, this agricultural landscape

- is still protected and drained by the same system,
- still exhibits distinctive field patterns, and
- is still managed through the same community approach.

Grand Pré is a testimony to the original Acadian settlers, the New England Planters who succeeded them, and the farmers who work the land today.

2. A symbolic landscape

Symbolically, the Landscape of Grand Pré is the single most important *lieu de mémoire* – place of memory – for millions of Acadians across the world.

The Acadians, originally from France, were one of the first people of European descent to call North America their homeland. The Landscape of Grand Pré is directly associated with the emergence of their identity. It is a symbol of collective achievement and pride that continues to shape that identity today.

It is also associated with their tragic forced removal, their subsequent migration, and their renaissance.

From deportation to diaspora

Over a period of seven years beginning in 1755, British authorities deported more than three-quarters of the approximately 14,000 Acadian men, women and children living in eastern Canada. Communities were scattered, and families

were separated. Some people were imprisoned and some died on the journey. The survivors faced a life of uncertainty and, in many cases, poverty.

Some of those who survived the Deportation returned to Nova Scotia in 1764, but most settled in what is now Quebec, Louisiana, France or French territories such as Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Santo Domingo (present-day Haiti), and Guyana.

Today, most of these places are home to thriving Acadian or Cajun communities. They share a common sense of history, values, and traditions embodied in the Landscape of Grand Pré.

The Acadian renaissance begins

Grand Pré's transformation to a symbolic landscape began in 1847. In that year, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's internationally renowned poem *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* was published, bringing an awareness of the Deportation and of Grand Pré to the world stage.

The Acadian renaissance took hold in the second half of the 19th century. Acadian newspapers, the Roman Catholic Church, and Acadian "national conventions" helped to strengthen Acadians' sense of identity.

In 1907, John Frederic Herbin, a jeweller and poet of Acadian descent in nearby Wolfville, purchased land at Grand Pré that contained ruins said to date back to before 1755. Two years later, the Herbin Cross was erected to mark the site of the old Acadian cemetery. In the 1920s, Acadians were responsible for creating the Memorial Church, the Deportation Cross, and other memorials.

A peaceful reclamation

Today, Acadians come to Grand Pré to understand their ancestors' legacy as expressed by the dykelands, the archaeological remains, and the memorials. These are powerful, tangible symbols of the impact of the Deportation on the Acadians, their attachment to their ancestral lands, their cultural survival, their collective memory, their identity, and their aspirations.

By raising public awareness, acquiring land, and erecting memorials, they have created a landscape that unites Acadians around the world. They achieved it without resorting to conflict or disrupting the ongoing agricultural community.

Grand Pré is inclusive and open to the world. It is an exceptional landscape of reconciliation and peaceful sharing of the land. Here, Acadians share their common heritage, reaffirm their identity, and continue to build their sense of community in a spirit of peaceful reconciliation with history.

Grand Pré provides a poignant and powerful living example of the universal human aspirations to belong to a community, to connect with one's homeland, and to make peace with the wrongs of the past.

The Landscape of Grand Pré has been peacefully and symbolically reclaimed by the Acadians. It is their emotional and spiritual centre.