

Acadian Diaspora lacks well-defined argument

By **HENRY ROPER**

I was sadly disappointed when I read Christopher Hodson's *The Acadian Diaspora*, as I hoped that it would be a worthy addition to a line of fine books on the Acadians that have appeared in English during the past 20 years.

Three examples come to mind. Naomi E.S. Griffiths' *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (2005) shows how the Acadians became conscious of themselves as a distinct people and developed strategies to ensure their survival on the fault line of two great empires. The complexity of the Acadians' situation was enhanced by their relations with the native peoples and the British colonies in New England, both crucial players in the struggle between Britain and France.

The shifts in British policies toward the Acadians between 1710 and 1755 have been perceptively dissected by the American historian Geoffrey Plank in *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia* (2001).

Another American, the eminent Yale historian John Mack Faragher, has

produced a masterly account of the Expulsion itself in *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland* (2005).

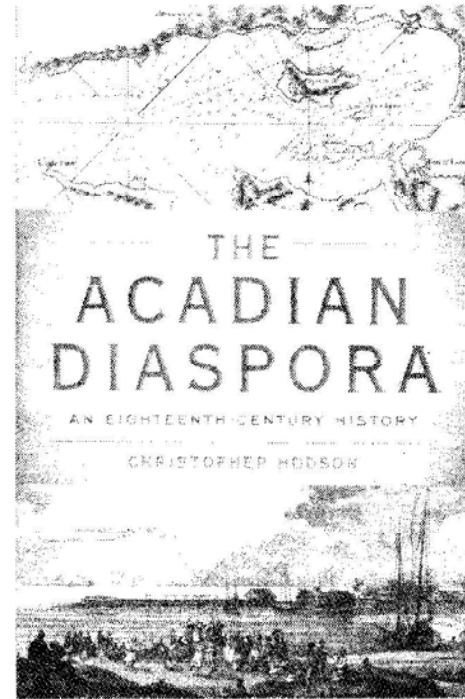
Christopher Hodson is an assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University in Utah. His book does not measure up to these works, all of which are well organized, clearly written, and accessible to the general reader.

The Acadian Diaspora lacks a well-defined argument and provides no systematic examination of where the Acadians were sent or the range of their experiences after the Expulsion.

Despite the title, the book is only partially about the fate of the Acadians. At a more general level, Hodson proposes that there was a "superheated demand for labour that engrossed officials in London and Paris," generating a need for Acadians to work in various imperial enterprises.

The author relates the Acadian diaspora to "an eighteenth-century moment of creativity in which the fashioning of more just, efficient, and muscular empires seemed not just possible but inevitable."

I'm not sure what Hodson means by



The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth Century History

Christopher Hodson

(Oxford University Press, 260 pgs., \$37.95)

this sweeping generalization as there is little in his book to support it, and his argument that the Acadians were the objects of a "superheated demand for labour" seems fanciful, to say the least.

If that was so, to make an obvious point, why did the French government allow 1,596 Acadians to emigrate from

France to the Spanish possession of Louisiana in 1785?

In order to substantiate his thesis about the important role of the Acadians in this "Atlantic labour market" Hodson devotes much of his attention to various failed French ventures in the West Indies and France involving the Acadians, which were of limited importance in the history of the diaspora as a whole.

By way of contrast, he has little to say about settlements in Louisiana, or Acadian efforts to return to their homeland. His discussion of the treatment meted out to them in the various Thirteen Colonies is impressionistic and confusing.

The Acadian Diaspora is littered with colloquialisms, awkward usages and non sequiturs. Poorly written and argued, and lacking specific detail about such obvious questions as the number of Acadians deported to the various American colonies, I am surprised that it was published by the Oxford University Press.

For those interested in the Acadian diaspora it is better to read Naomi E.S. Griffiths' *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686-1784* (1992) or Faragher's *A Great and Noble Scheme*; they are far more informative than the book under review.

Before retirement Henry Roper was a professor of humanities at the University of King's College. He is past president of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society.