

# The Architecture of Resilience: Alexis Landry and the Institutional Founding of Caraquet, 1721–1798

## I. Introduction: The Patriarch of Caraquet and the Geography of Survival

Alexis Landry (1721–1798) stands as the singular figure most central to the successful resettlement of Acadians in the Baie des Chaleurs region following the *Grand Dérangement*. Recognized explicitly in local history as the "most important Acadian Patriarch" and the *véritable fondateur* (true founder) of Caraquet, New Brunswick, Landry's life story traces the trajectory of Acadian persistence in the face of sustained British military persecution. His journey from a property owner in Grand-Pré to a refugee merchant and appointed colonial official illustrates a rare and successful narrative of self-determination following collective trauma.

The context of Landry's founding is defined by the *Grand Dérangement*, the period of forced expulsion spanning from 1755 to 1763. However, Landry's experience differed significantly from the collective memory often associated with the deportation. He was not a deportee transported by ship, but an internal refugee who actively evaded British forces after participating in the defense of Fort Beauséjour. This distinction is crucial; unlike the thousands exiled overseas, Landry's community represented a movement of refugees seeking strategic isolation in remote French territories to avoid capture. This foundational act of resistance endowed the nascent community of Caraquet, particularly Haut-Caraquet, with a distinct historical narrative of resilience and self-governance.

The foundation of Caraquet was not a single event but a multi-stage process of initial occupation, flight, and determined re-occupation, spanning over a decade. Landry's eventual success in establishing a permanent community was contingent upon three key factors: pragmatic integration through trade relationships with the English magistrate George Walker ; the decisive establishment of civic identity via formal appointments as Tax Assessor and Road Commissioner ; and the creation of a powerful spiritual anchor at the Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage Sanctuary. These actions transformed a precarious refugee settlement into a formalized, self-sustaining community, ensuring the perpetuation of Acadian culture in a challenging colonial environment. The spiritual site he founded became the primary institutional validator of his leadership, perpetually linking Acadian faith, nationalism, and the memory of the founding event.

## II. Genesis of a Refugee: Life in Grand-Pré and Beaubassin (1721–1755)

### The Roots of the Patriarch

Alexis Landry was born in Acadia, specifically in the village of St-Charles-les-Mines, Grand-Pré, in what is now Nova Scotia. His birth and subsequent baptism occurred on August 25, 1721. He

was the son of Jean Landry and Claire Le Blanc. A notable element of his family background was his mother's connection to the respected Acadian Notary René Leblanc. This lineage may have provided Landry with early exposure to the administrative and legal structures of Acadian society.

Around 1743, Landry relocated from Grand-Pré to the seigneurie of Beaubassin, near Aulac, New Brunswick. This geographical shift placed him in a critical, conflict-prone frontier zone between French and British influence. His status was further elevated around 1744 or 1745 when he married Marie Thériault (Terriot), who was the widow of Jean-Baptiste Cormier. This marital union was strategic, as Landry gained property rights and settlement status in Beaubassin by taking possession of Marie's previous property. The marriage brought at least three stepsons (Cormier) into the family, and the couple went on to have at least 11 children together. This early pattern of relocating to a frontier area and acquiring status through strategic alliance suggests that Landry possessed an innate entrepreneurial and risk-taking spirit, a disposition that proved essential for his later success as a merchant and builder in Caraquet.

## **The Military Crucible**

The Beaubassin area became central to the escalating conflict between France and Britain. In May 1750, the British attempted to seize control of the village, a move foiled by French Canadian forces. Recognizing the area's strategic vulnerability, Abbé LeLoutre, the Missionary of the Micmacs, played an influential role in encouraging Acadians to move to secure French territories like Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island) or the southern section of today's New Brunswick. The Acadians, however, were reluctant to abandon their fertile land. To prevent the inevitable British capture of Beaubassin, French authorities supported a drastic measure: the Micmacs, under LeLoutre's direction, set fire to the village, forcing the inhabitants, including Landry and his family, to seek refuge near Fort Beauséjour, specifically in the small Village d'Aulac.

By 1755, Landry was directly involved in the military conflict, participating in the defense of Fort Beauséjour against the British. The fort surrendered to Robert Monckton on June 16, 1755. Landry's active participation in the defense officially designated him as an enemy combatant in the eyes of the British. This critical detail confirms that his subsequent flight was not merely an attempt to avoid mass deportation but a necessary measure to escape targeted capture and retribution, a fact that intensified the precariousness of his life post-1755.

## **III. The Grand Dérangement and the Trail of Famine (1755–1768)**

### **The Retreat into the Wilderness**

Following the fall of Fort Beauséjour, Landry and his family were forced to immediately evacuate Aulac. Like many other Acadians, they initially retreated along the coast, seeking refuge at Cocagne, specifically on the Ruisseau des Malcontents, where they remained hidden until the end of the winter.

In the spring of 1756, Landry made the fateful decision to travel further north toward Miramichi. The hope was to reach a location sufficiently distant from British raids where the family could subsist through hunting and fishing. This calculated search for geographical distance from

colonial control defined the initial rationale for his eventual settlement area.

The subsequent winter of 1756–1757 at Miramichi proved catastrophic. The Acadians endured a "terrible winter of war, famine, and pestilence". Historical accounts indicate that around 600 Acadians starved to death in the region. Landry suffered an immense personal tragedy during this ordeal, losing five of his own children. This profound period of suffering served as a powerful filter, ensuring that those who survived and continued north possessed an extraordinary level of resilience and unwavering commitment to permanent settlement. The shared ordeal became an integral component of the founding mythos of Caraquet, legitimizing the authority of the surviving "refugee" cohort.

## **Initial Clandestine Settlement and Near Capture**

By the spring of 1757, Landry, accompanied by three other families, had made his way north to Caraquet. They settled in the area known today as Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage. This initial settlement location was chosen primarily for its remoteness and security, representing a place of last resort after two years of continuous flight. While the exact date of their arrival remains speculative, the 1761 census taken by Pierre Du Calvet confirmed Landry's presence, recording a household that included five boys and two girls.

However, the relative *tranquility* of the northern refuge did not last. In October 1761, British forces, led by Captain Roderick MacKenzie, launched a raid against the settlements on the Baie des Chaleurs. Landry and his family were captured and placed on a list of prisoners destined for Fort Cumberland (formerly Fort Beauséjour). Fortunately for Landry and 156 others, a lack of boat space forced MacKenzie to abandon the group in Caraquet, saving them from deportation. This narrow escape confirmed that the British military threat persisted despite the geographical distance.

Following this traumatic event, Landry immediately recognized the necessity of a tactical retreat. For security, he moved his family to Miscou Island, settling near a location later named Landrys River. This period demonstrates that the establishment of Caraquet was not simply an act of occupation but a relentless struggle for survival against repeated attempts at removal, transforming the "founding" into a multi-stage process of enduring resistance.

## **IV. The Institutional Founding: Securing Legal Tenure (1761–1787)**

The period between 1768 and 1787 marked the critical transition of Caraquet from a temporary refugee camp to a legally recognized Acadian community, largely orchestrated by Landry's determination and his successful negotiation with colonial authorities.

### **The Permanent Return and Official Sanction**

In the spring of 1768, Alexis Landry demonstrated his unwavering commitment to the land he had occupied earlier by bringing his family back to Caraquet, resettling on his previous land in Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage. The following year, on March 13, 1769, Landry achieved the first major institutional victory: George Walker, the magistrate and justice of the peace at Nepisiguit (Bathurst), granted him official permission to settle on the land, provided it had not been previously allocated.

The official sanction from Walker, a British colonial representative, was not accidental. Landry

had already established a burgeoning business relationship with Walker, which proved instrumental in securing legal tenure. This suggests that the colonial authorities recognized the Caraquet settlement not out of humanitarian concern, but because Landry proved the community possessed the economic utility—namely, through fishing and trade—that served the commercial interests of the British colonial system. Official documentation of settlement began to accumulate; registers of 1779 confirmed Charles Poirier as the second settler after Landry.

## Formalizing Property Rights

Securing legal land titles was the next crucial step in cementing the permanence of Caraquet. In 1784, Landry received the formal title to his occupied land. This occurred within the context of a wider administrative effort by the Governor of Nova Scotia to concede 14 150-acre lots to 34 families, most of whom were descendants of the first Caraquet inhabitants. This concession included Landry’s adult children, such as Anselme, Thadde, François, and Rémi Landry. Further demonstrating his standing and foresight, Landry secured a specific and highly strategic land grant three years later, in 1787. Governor Thomas Carleton granted him rights to "the meadows and tidal flats located along the Rivière du Nord". This specific grant was fundamentally important for the community’s long-term sustainability, as tidal flats provided essential marsh hay for wintering livestock and guaranteed access to vital coastal fishing resources, moving the community past subsistence farming.

The following table summarizes the decisive administrative milestones in Alexis Landry’s journey to institutionalize Caraquet:

Table 1: Key Chronology of Alexis Landry’s Life and the Founding of Caraquet

| Date Range     | Event Description                                                       | Source ID |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1721           | Birth/Baptism in Grand-Pré, Acadia.                                     |           |
| 1755           | Participated in the defense and fall of Fort Beauséjour; flight begins. |           |
| 1756–1757      | Catastrophic winter and famine at Miramichi (loss of 5 children).       |           |
| c. 1757        | Initial arrival and clandestine settlement attempt in Caraquet.         |           |
| October 1761   | Capture by Captain MacKenzie; narrowly escapes deportation.             |           |
| 1761–1768      | Strategic retreat and residence on Miscou Island.                       |           |
| Spring 1768    | Permanent return to Caraquet (Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage).                   |           |
| March 13, 1769 | Official permission to settle granted by Magistrate George Walker.      |           |
| 1784           | Receives formal title to his land (Grand Concession).                   |           |
| July 14, 1794  | Appointed Tax Assessor and Road Commissioner.                           |           |
| March 6, 1798  | Death of Alexis Landry in                                               |           |

| Date Range | Event Description | Source ID |
|------------|-------------------|-----------|
|            | Caraquet.         |           |

## V. The Economic and Civic Architecture of Caraquet

Alexis Landry’s leadership extended beyond securing land tenure; he was the primary architect of Caraquet’s economic and civic structure, transforming a remote refuge into a viable economic hub capable of formal integration into the colonial system.

### Commercial and Industrial Development

Landry’s pre-war experience in Beaubassin prepared him for post-war entrepreneurial success. Beginning around 1766, he established himself as a merchant, engaging in a "lively trade in imported goods". He skillfully leveraged the community’s access to maritime resources, exporting cod in exchange for vital imported commodities acquired from trading centers like Nepisiguit, Bonaventure, and Paspébiac, Quebec. This trade network was essential for the provisioning and survival of the growing Acadian population.

Landry further diversified the local economy by moving into industrial production. In 1775, he became a shipbuilder, demonstrating the highly organized labor and resource management necessary to manage such complex projects. The following year, in 1776, he completed a significant contract, delivering a brigantine to Walker's company in Nepisiguit, which was ultimately destined for a London company. This success confirms Landry’s status not just as a local leader but as a competent Master shipbuilder and carpenter integrated directly into the Anglo-colonial commercial market. This transition from subsistence fishing to industrial output cemented Caraquet's economic viability and utility to the broader colonial administration.

### Formal Civic Integration

The culmination of Landry’s relationship with the colonial government came through his official civic appointments. On July 14, 1794, Alexis Landry was formally appointed Tax Assessor and Road Commissioner for the parish of Caraquet. This was a watershed moment, symbolizing the complete transformation of the community from a clandestine settlement to a recognized, functioning governance unit.

By accepting responsibility for colonial revenue collection (tax assessor) and local infrastructure development (road commissioner), Landry institutionalized the link between the Acadian community and the British administration. The fact that he was entrusted with these fiscal and civil duties, ten years after receiving formal land titles and decades after establishing trade, underscores a crucial principle: British acceptance was conditional on Caraquet’s proven economic productivity and administrative organization. His administrative appointment marked the definitive end of the community's fugitive status.

The civic and economic roles undertaken by Landry were essential for the long-term stability of the community:

Table 2: Economic and Civic Roles of Alexis Landry (1766–1794)

| Year (Approximate) | Role/Activity                            | Economic/Civic Significance                              | Source ID |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1766 onward        | Merchant/Trader (Cod for imported goods) | Established vital commercial linkages; secured community |           |

| Year (Approximate)    | Role/Activity                               | Economic/Civic Significance                                                             | Source ID |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                       |                                             | provisioning.                                                                           |           |
| 1775–1776             | Shipbuilder<br>(Construction of brigantine) | Demonstrated industrial capacity; integrated into British commercial markets (London).  |           |
| 1791–1793             | Spiritual Founder/Land Donor                | Established the religious centre of the community (Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage).              |           |
| Lay Leader (Pre-1798) | Conducted baptisms, marriages, burials      | Maintained demographic records and spiritual cohesion during missionary absence.        |           |
| July 14, 1794         | Tax Assessor/Road Commissioner              | Formalized political integration; managed local infrastructure and colonial tax duties. |           |

## VI. Spiritual Anchor: The Founding of Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage

Long before formal land grants or civic appointments, Landry recognized the necessity of spiritual continuity as a stabilizing force for the exiled community.

### Lay Leadership and the Construction of the Chapel

Upon his initial arrival around 1757, Landry installed a statue of Saint Anne, demonstrating immediate spiritual devotion. Due to the severe shortage of missionary priests in the remote region (a promise from the Bishop of Quebec for a resident missionary only came in 1766), Landry assumed substantial religious duties. He was noted for conducting "white masses"—services without a priest—and taking the place of clergy when necessary for baptisms, marriages, and burials. This lay leadership was critical not only for spiritual welfare but also for preserving the community's demographic and cultural identity by maintaining vital records that might otherwise have been lost during the isolation period.

In 1791, Landry took steps to have a formal chapel erected at Caraquet. On July 10, 1793, he officially made over the land for the sanctuary. By this time, a log church, possibly initiated by Landry, might have existed as early as 1771 or 1772.

### Institutionalizing a Personal Legacy

The donation of the land for the chapel came with highly specific legal stipulations designed to guarantee perpetual recognition of Landry's foundational role. The conditions stipulated that he and his heirs would receive the free, unlimited use of a four-seat closed pew, and, critically, that

the parish council would bear the cost of his funeral service and burial within the chapel. These contractual demands were a conscious effort by Landry to assert and institutionalize his legacy, ensuring that the religious edifice he enabled would forever commemorate his authority as founder.

Landry continued to champion the community's spiritual needs until his death. Around 1795, he wrote to Pierre Denaut, the coadjutor of the bishop of Quebec, appealing for Bishop Hubert to send a resident priest to Caraquet.

## Death, Burial, and Memorialization

Alexis Landry died on March 6, 1798, at the age of 76, in Caraquet. As stipulated in his land grant, he was buried in the cemetery at the Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage Sanctuary. This cemetery is a historically significant site, acknowledged as one of the few known, confirmed burial locations for a survivor of the Acadian Deportation.

The site serves as the central physical memorial to Landry. A significant stone monument was inaugurated in 1961, replacing an earlier structure from 1956. The monument features a depiction of Landry greeting his grandson, Joseph-Marie (1794). The pedestal is richly adorned with panels that intentionally frame Landry's life within the national narrative of Acadian survival: one panel depicts the Deportation, another the "miraculous fishing" (survival), and a third commemorates the arrival of the founders. This deliberate framing ensures that Landry's personal history is interpreted as a symbol of Acadian endurance and successful cultural persistence.

## VII. Socio-Cultural Dynamics: The Divided Settlement

While Alexis Landry successfully established the economic and administrative legitimacy of Caraquet, the internal social structure of the new town was marked by deep and lasting divisions related to the identity of its founding groups.

### Demographics of Division

Landry, returning in 1768, resettled with his family and was soon joined by other Acadian families. This initial cohort was heavily supplemented, leading to the 1784 concession that formalized land tenure for 34 families. However, the settlement quickly stratified along geographical and ethnic lines, resulting in two distinct zones:

1. **Haut-Caraquet (West):** This area was formed by the Acadian refugees who had fled the *Dérangement* alongside Landry. They were characterized as being a relatively homogeneous group of "fervent Catholics".
2. **Bas-Caraquet (East):** This eastern section was settled by a mix of French Canadians, Normans, and other French speakers. Critically, this group was characterized by "strong interbreeding," suggesting historical alliances or marriages with Indigenous populations.

### The Purity Paradox and the Métis Question

The division between the two founding groups was not simply geographical but ideological, rooted in a deep-seated prejudice known as the "Métis Question". The Acadian refugees of Haut-Caraquet asserted a claim to cultural and ethnic purity, openly despising the French

Canadian and Norman settlers of Bas-Caraquet on the pretext that they were "too mixed blood and therefore less pure".

This stance presents a historical paradox: the Acadian refugees who fled with Landry had often relied on alliances with the Micmacs and French missionaries like Abbé LeLoutre during their periods of flight and internal exile. Yet, in establishing their new home, the Acadian cohort, traumatized by the *Dérangement*, felt compelled to define their identity through a strict cultural standard. The explicit rejection of perceived indigenous ancestry became a strategy for self-definition and the creation of a unified, "pure" cultural narrative, necessary for stabilizing their community after displacement.

The resulting schism proved immensely durable. Historical accounts recorded by William Ganong indicate that there was **no marriage between the two communities for about 50 years** following the founding. An 1822 missionary in Caraquet recorded the bitter sentiment: *"You know that a certain part of the parish despises the other on the pretext that their ancestors allied with savages"*. This profound social barrier demonstrates that the cultural and ethnic divisions of the founding groups were more potent determinants of local structure than Landry's formal civic authority as Tax Assessor and Road Commissioner for the entire parish. Furthermore, the chapel built on Landry's land in Haut-Caraquet was linked to this local quarrel, solidifying the western section as the legitimate spiritual and cultural core.

Table 3: Socio-Geographical Division in Early Caraquet (Post-1768)

| Settlement Area       | Founding Group                   | Key Identity/Characterization                           | Socio-Cultural Dynamic                                          | Source ID |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Haut-Caraquet (West)  | Acadian Refugees                 | Led by Alexis Landry; homogeneous, "fervent Catholics." | Asserted ethnic/racial "purity" over Eastern group.             |           |
| Bas-Caraquet (East)   | French Canadians, Normans, Métis | Marked by "strong interbreeding" (Métis Question).      | Subject of deep prejudice; intermarriage refusal for ~50 years. |           |
| Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage | Spiritual Centre (West)          | Located on Landry's donated land.                       | Location of spiritual center linked to local power struggles.   |           |

## VIII. Conclusion: Legacy, Memory, and the Continuance of Caraquet

Alexis Landry's life epitomizes the determined spirit of the Acadian people following the expulsion. His personal journey, marked by military opposition to the British, catastrophic personal loss in the Miramichi famine, and repeated evasion of deportation, provided the raw material of a leadership narrative based on unparalleled resilience. He successfully transitioned the community of Caraquet from a temporary clandestine refuge (1757) to a legally sanctioned town with self-sustaining economic and political structures (1784–1794). This foundation rested on his acumen as a merchant and shipbuilder, which allowed him to negotiate official legal tenure through pragmatic engagement with British

representatives like George Walker. Furthermore, his lay spiritual leadership was instrumental in maintaining cultural cohesion and records during periods of extreme isolation, culminating in the creation of the Sainte-Anne-du-Bocage Sanctuary.

The lasting significance of Alexis Landry is most visibly maintained at the Sanctuary, where his grave and monument link his personal story to the broader history of Acadian nationalism. The memorial deliberately constructs his biography as a synthesis of the Acadian experience: flight from the Deportation, miraculous survival, and the ultimate victory of establishing permanent roots. While the social reality of early Caraquet was fractured by the enduring prejudice of the "Métis Question," Landry's achievement lies in providing the essential economic, legal, and spiritual scaffolding that allowed the Acadian identity to persist and flourish in Northern New Brunswick.

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