



Prince Edward Island

WHO WAS EDME RAMEAU DE SAINT-PÈRE?

Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt kept a lengthy and rich correspondence with a journalist and historian from France named Edme (pronounced Edmé) Rameau de Saint-Père. Father Belcourt never had a chance to meet him, but he still received considerable help from him for his projects in Rustico.

This wealthy man was 40 years old when he contacted Father Belcourt. He had a great interest in the history of the French in North America. In 1859, he published a book entitled *La France aux Colonies* in which he devoted a significant part to the Acadians. He continued his research and, in 1877 and 1889, he published two books on the Acadian community covering the years 1604 to 1881.

Edme Rameau's interest in the Acadians was not only limited to their history. He wanted above all to help them to preserve their identity, and thus to live and survive as Francophones in an Anglophone-dominated environment. He corresponded with several leaders of the Acadian community in the Maritimes offering them advice and even financial assistance to ensure their social and economic development. He writes in his book *La France aux Colonies*:



Edme Rameau de Saint-Père. (Wikipedia) ▲

If their race is to have any future and keep itself distinct, they must create compact groups and of a certain size; they must extend into the interior of the country they inhabit. To achieve this goal, part of the Acadian youth, guided and led if necessary by the elders of the country, must go to the woods and the barrens of the interior and create new parishes, behind the old ones, in order to gain a large share in the ownership of the soil, this essential base of a nationality. (Translation)

FATHER BELCOURT BECOMES FRIENDS WITH EDME RAMEAU

In 1860, the historian Edme Rameau came to meet the Acadians of the Maritimes and to continue his research. He did not travel to Prince Edward Island, but he heard about the Acadians' emigration project from Rustico to the Township of Matapedia, a project which greatly interested him. On September 20, 1860, before returning to France, he wrote to Father Belcourt. He requested some information on his project, and also on the history and the current situation of the Island Acadians:

I wanted to complete my research on the history of the Acadians and on their present state of affairs by visiting them on Isle Saint-Jean, and then when I arrived in Bonaventure County and learned of the little colony you were about to establish on the Matapedia, I doubly regretted that I had not been able to visit and study this interesting population, and you personally, in order to see it up close and to talk with you about your excellent projects. (Translation)

Father Belcourt replied immediately to the French historian's questions in a long six-page letter in which he even requested financial help for the settlers of Matapedia. This was the beginning of the correspondence

between Father Belcourt and Mr. Rameau that lasted for over 10 years. Fortunately, the letters have been preserved and they provide a great deal of information on the priest's work in Rustico and the help he received from France.

THE FRENCH EMPEROR'S GIFTS

Thanks to Edme Rameau's help, Father Belcourt was able to obtain sums of money from the French Emperor, Napoleon III, for his projects in Rustico. The French historian gave Father Belcourt advice on writing letters to the emperor. He instructed him on how to address this great personality, suggested what to say and what to request in his letters, and warned him to be concise.

Edme Rameau also reminded Father Belcourt that it was important to thank the emperor for his gifts and to report back to him on how he had used the money received. As Father Belcourt told Edme Rameau in 1863, Napoleon III's financial assistance was remarkable:



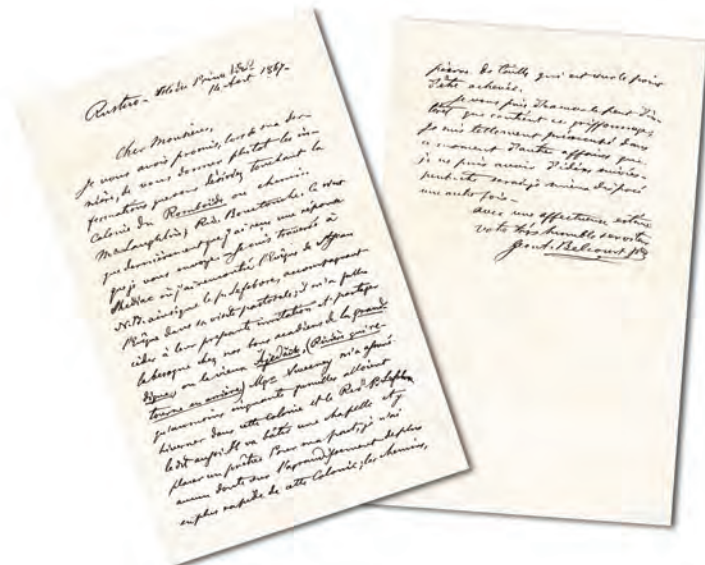
Bust of
Napoleon III,
Farmers' Bank
Museum of
Rustico. (Photo
◀ - Carter Jeffery)

We purchased almost fifty volumes in Québec City for our library, along with a globe of the world, a globe of the heavens, plus an armillary sphere to complete the set. In addition, a musical instrument (harmonium), and part of the salary for a Canadian organist hired to play the church organ which I purchased last autumn, to teach music and to make a model school at the Institute to train schoolmasters. All these things were paid for with the money from the Emperor's gift and part of the members' annual contributions.

A GREAT FRIEND OF THE ACADIANS

In his numerous letters to Edme Rameau, Father Belcourt kept him informed of the situation of Island Acadians and of the families who had settled in Saint-Alexis-de-Matapédia and Saint-Paul-de-Kent. He asked him for advice and help, particularly to buy books for the Catholic Institute Library and for the publication of his French-Sauteux dictionary which he had compiled while living with Indigenous Peoples in the West.

For 40 years, Edme Rameau de Saint-Père supported educational and settlement projects throughout the Acadian communities. He was called “the great friend of the Acadians.” In announcing his death in 1899, *L'Évangéline* newspaper called him the “historian and benefactor of Acadie.”



Example of a letter from Belcourt to Rameau ▲

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What is the historical importance of the correspondence between Father Belcourt and Edme Rameau?
2. Edme Rameau says: “It is necessary that they extend into the interior of the country they inhabit.” Why does he think this is necessary?
3. If you had to raise money for an important cause today, who would you write to? Write a request.