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Résumé de l'article

Les Acadiens des provinces maritimes du Canada ont développé une identité ethnique différente des autres habitants de la Nouvelle-France, une identité qui est reflétée dans leurs institutions sociales et politiques ainsi que dans leurs habitations. Cet article étudie l'architecture domestique acadienne du XVIII^{e} siècle dans le bassin de la rivière Annapolis. Les découvertes archéologiques dans cette région servent à répondre aux questions suivantes: Quelle était la spécificité acadienne de cette architecture domestique-ses méthodes de construction, ses matériaux, le style et les caractéristiques spatiales de ses maisons? Quel lien existe-t-il entre ces dernières et les maisons acadiennes en Louisiane, qui furent bâties après le «grand dérangement»?

HOME AND HEARTH: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ACADIAN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

Andrée CRÉPEAU
David CHRISTIANSON

The Acadian residents of the Maritime Provinces of Canada developed an ethnic identity distinct from that of the larger population of New France. This ethnicity was reflected in social and political institutions, and in a distinctive pattern of settlement. Communities in the heartland of Acadia were arranged around the perimeters of the salt-marshes situated at the mouths of rivers and streams flowing into the Bay of Fundy. As the arrangement of these communities over the landscape represents the settlement activities of a society, then the style of houses, and the materials and construction techniques used to build them, reflect the ideas of individuals and families. The range of domestic architectural styles and construction techniques represents the shared societal perception of what constituted an Acadian House.

This paper examines domestic architecture in the Annapolis River Basin area of Acadian settlement during the eighteenth century. Archaeological data are used to examine the question of whether there was an identifiable Acadian house pattern for the place and period. That is, were there trends in the construction methods, spatial characteristics, materials used and style of houses built by the Acadian residents of the Bay of Fundy marshlands?

A second question, only briefly addressed, is whether the houses built by the Acadians who resettled to Louisiana in the late eighteenth century reflect the dwellings formerly built in Acadia.

Research Orientation

Research on pre-expulsion Acadian domestic architecture has relied principally upon two sources of information: period documentary descriptions, and analogies with nineteenth-century Acadian house styles.[1] There are problems with both of these sources. The settlements occupied by Acadians in the nineteenth century were for the most part located outside of the Bay of Fundy marshlands. With the new locations also came new economic adaptations to different environmental settings. As well, the Acadians who returned to the

1. Bourque, J. Rodolphe, 1971, *Social and Architectural Aspects of Acadians in New Brunswick.* Historical Resources Administration: Fredricton; LeBlanc, Bernard V. and Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc, La Culture Materielle Traditionnelle en Acadie. 1993. In *L'Acadie Des Maritimes.* Université de Moncton.

Maritime Provinces had resided in France and the southeastern United States, and, presumably, had been influenced by experiences in these places.

With respect to period documents, historians have had little to use when describing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Acadian domestic architecture. The written record consists of only a handful of comments by French and English officials. These texts have been discussed in detail by other researchers. (Clark 1968; Coleman 1968; Cullen 1983; Deveau 1982a, 1982b; Dunn 1986; 1985, Ennals 1981; Ennals and Holdsworth 1981). For our purposes, the following accounts, all describing houses at Port Royal, indicate the nature of this material.

Governor Menneval in 1688 noted "wretched dwellings of mud and wood," while ca. 1701, Soeur Chausson described the houses as "colombage" covered in thatch. British Army Captain John Knox, writing in the mid-eighteenth-century (Deveau 1982b:40) described the houses at Port Royal as miserable and generally built of wood.

What is missing from these descriptions is an Acadian voice. There are no accounts from diaries, no letters between spouses concerning the arrangements for the construction of a house, no large body of documents detailing the sale of properties or disputes between builders and owners. The absence of this documentation robs history of the insider's view of how these houses were built, their use and maintenance, and the details of their function.

Archaeology can provide, at least partially, that missing voice. Rarely will the archaeological record yield sufficient detail to completely reconstruct a building from the ground to the roof line, but it can consistently tell you the size of a building, materials used in its construction, in a general sense how it was built, and information on its life history.

The following discussion on the houses of eighteenth-century Acadia is derived largely from the two representative archaeological sites that have been most extensively excavated and analyzed: Belleisle (Preston 1971, 1972; Christianson 1984a, 1984b; Lavoie 1988) and the Melanson Settlement site (Crepeau and Dunn 1986; Crepeau and Dunn nd.).[2] These sites (Fig. 1) are located along the lower Annapolis River near Annapolis Royal (Port Royal prior to 1714), an area where the distinctive Acadian culture developed.

At Belleisle, four house sites were recorded with House 1 (Fig. 2) in the sequence being extensively excavated and House 2, tested. The House 1 excava-

2. Brian Preston, "An Archaeological Survey of Reported Acadian Habitation Sites in the Annapolis Valley and Minas Basin Area, 1971", Curatorial Report No. 20, Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum; Frank Korvemaker, 1972, "Report on the 1972 Excavations of two Acadian Houses at Grand Pre National Park, Nova Scotia", Manuscript Report Series No. 143, Ottawa: Parks Canada. Brian Preston, "Archaeological Fieldwork Summary Report", In: *Archaeology in Nova Scotia 1985 and 1986*, ed. Stephen A. Davis et al., Curatorial Report No. 63: 229-257, Dec. 1987, Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum. Marc C. Lavoie, "Archaeological Evidence of Planter Material Culture in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia", In: *Making Adjustments; Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia 1759-1800*, ed. Margaret Conrad.

tion revealed the successive use of a single foundation for a second structure after the first had been destroyed by fire. At the Melanson Settlement, seven house ruins were recorded. Two were tested and one, known as Feature 8, was fully excavated revealing four superimposed buildings (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Information from several other sites is used for the section on house dimensions. This material is derived from archaeological surveys or small-scale excavations in the lower Annapolis River and the Minas Basin areas of Nova Scotia. As well, unpublished data from Maritime Archaeological Resource Inventory (M.A.R.I.) forms for the Province of Nova Scotia have been utilized.[3]

Construction Techniques and Materials

The settlers of "Acadia" built wooden houses using techniques that were common in European cultures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Methods that they employed can be found in other French and English colonial establishments including Louisbourg (Krause 1983), Louisiana (Ancelet *et al.* 1991), and Virginia (Carson *et al.* 1981).

These techniques can be grouped into two variables. The first consists of earthfast buildings, that is, wooden structures set directly on the ground or planted in it, and those that use footings or foundations to separate the wooden superstructure from the ground. The second variable is the fabrication of framed versus unframed buildings.

A framed building in the French Canadian setting is called *charpente*.[4] Hewn timbers were mortised and tenoned together to make a skeletal box-like frame. Generally, both the sill and plate were continuous and formed the top and bottom of the frame (Fig. 7). They were separated by regularly spaced uprights with or without angled braces. The space between the uprights was filled with a variety of materials. A common Acadian choice was a *bousillage* made from mud

3. The Maritime Archaeological Resource Inventory, (M.A.R.I.) forms constitute a basic field inventory of archaeological sites in the Maritime Provinces of Canada. The Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax is the repository for the M.A.R.I. site information used in this paper.

4. A considerable number of French terms are used to describe timber frame buldings. They include *charpente*, *colombage*, and *poteaux sur sol*. Even more variation is evident when the construction type is identified not by the framing method, but rather by the material used to fill the frame, such as *maison de torchis*. During the eighteenth century at Louisbourg, the most consistently used term was *charpente*. See Krause, Eric R. 1974. Private Buildings in Louisbourg: 1713-1758. In *Canada: An Historical Magazine*, I:4, 49; Moogk, Peter. 1977. *Building a House in New France*, p. 25 : McClelland and Stewart; Toronto. Sequin, Robert-Lionel. 1968. *La Maison en Nouvelle-France*, Bulletin 226, Ottawa: Musee national du Canada. pp. 11-37; Sequin, Robert-Lionel. 1963. *Les Granges du Quebec* Bulletin 192, p. 61. Ottawa: Musee National du Canada; LeBlanc, Bernard V. and Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc. 1991. La Culture Materielle Traditionnelle en Acadie. In *L'Acadie Des Maritimes*, p. 631, Moncton: Universite de Moncton; Ancelet, Barry Jean. 1991. Jay Edwards, and Glen Pitre, Cajun Country, (University Press of Mississippi), 123

and chopped marsh grasses. In Louisiana, *bousillage* was adapted to local materials with Spanish moss being substituted for marsh grass.

The house exterior was parged and/or planked and the common interior finish was a clay daub or mud plaster called *crépis*. Pieces of a daub plaster recovered from Belleisle House 1 were finished with a thin, white coating. Initial tests of the coating did not show the presence of lime; it may consist of the white clay found locally. A new analysis of this material is planned.

Belleisle Houses 1 and 2 and Melanson Feature 8, structures 3 and 4, are examples of *charpente* construction. The Belleisle house frames had continuous sills. The floor joists joined the framing at the sill level. These house frames sat on wide, drylaid fieldstone foundations raised three to four courses high. Melanson Structure 3 also had a continuous sill but the flooring was not attached to the frame. While the frame sat on a fieldstone foundation mortared with puddled clay, the flooring rested directly on the ground.

Another framing variation can be found in Melanson Structure 4 (Fig. 6). This building probably had an interrupted or non-continuous sill (Fig. 8). In this type of *charpente* structure the uprights extended below the level of the sill. Rather than resting the uprights on the sill, the sill became a series of short pieces of timber fitted between all or some of the vertical posts. The bottoms of the uprights rested in pockets, or low spots, within the drylaid stone foundation. The floor in the Melanson dwelling was not attached to the frame. It was raised above the ground on a series of stones.

Earthfast buildings are wooden structures whose main components are in contact with the ground. The most common earthfast, unframed structure is known as vertical post, or *piquet* construction (Fig. 9). In Louisiana, this type of building is called *poteau en terre*. Here closely spaced posts were driven into the ground to form palisade-like exterior walls. The post tops were attached to a plate. Melanson structure 1 is an example of a *piquet* building with an earthen floor (Fig. 3). The second type of earthfast construction is a spaced *piquet* with a mud infill. It also can be thought of as a sill-less *charpente* house planted in the ground (Fig. 10). Melanson structure 2 is an example of a spaced *piquet* construction (Fig. 4). The floor boards were attached to trench-laid sleepers.

All of the framed structures in our sample had cellars or storage pits. They were roughly dug, slope-sided pits with an approximate depth of 1.0 meter below the floor level. Two cellars (Belleisle House 1 and Melanson 4) were lined with clay and the remainder had no floor or wall preparation. It is not known if the earthfast structures had cellars. Subsequent construction activity has removed any evidence of earlier cellars. All of the excavated buildings yielded building hardware. While the collection of construction and finish hardware is small, suggesting that these items were salvaged and reused, the number of nails found is considerably larger, indicating abandonment. The hardware collection includes beam bolts, locks, staples and hinges.

Historical documents cite bark, shingles, boards and thatch as roofing materials. Charred bundles of roofing thatch made from a local, marsh grass (*Spartina alterniflora*) were found at Belleisle. The excavations at Belleisle and Melanson both produced small quantities of window glass. But the distributions were not significant with respect to window location or size. Several lengths of window cames were found in the debris of Melanson Structure 3.

The fireplace/hearth/oven complex was a dominant element in the Acadian house. Within our sample we were able to examine in detail fireplaces associated with five structures. All of the fireplaces share a number of common features. They were usually built as part of the exterior west wall of the house occupying between 2.6 and 3.2 meters of horizontal space; all were centrally located along the wall; and all had a fieldstone base. Those fireplaces with elements surviving above the level of the hearth were made from stone, mortared and parged with puddled clay or mud. The flue was presumably a wood frame with clay infill and finished surfaces. A concentration of low-fired brick was recovered at Belleisle in the fireplace area and may have lined the firebox.

Four of the five fireplaces had large paved hearths that extended well beyond the firebox and out into the living area. These paved surfaces varied in depth from 1.25 to 1.75 meters. All of the hearths at the Melanson Settlement were made of uncut basalt and slate stones set in an earth pad. Two worked slate hearth tiles, measuring 5-cm thick and 30-cm square, were found at Belleisle.[5]

Three of the five fireplaces had attached ovens. Ovens are not common house features in French urban colonial settings. In Louisbourg, for example townsfolk took their bread to commercial bakers. In areas of France where the seigneurial system was entrenched, ovens were owned by the *seigneurs* and located near the manor house. Peasants were obliged to pay for their use. In Acadia, ovens frequently seem to be part of private dwellings. In 1795, Captain John Macdonald described an oven at Minudie, an Acadian village that continued marshland agriculture following the expulsion.

> Behind the chimney on the outside is an oven of clay, the opening to which for bread & fire is on the Inside back of the chimney. The oven rests on a square wall of logs or stone around an apartment three or four feet in the square, ... [PAC MG 23, fo. 1-2, Desbarres Papers Series 2: Captain John MacDonald's Report,1795.]

The Belleisle oven rested on a circular fieldstone foundation with a diameter of 2.5 meters. Evidence of an oven at Melanson consisted of a collapsed semicircular oven floor made of unfired clay tiles 16cm square by 5cm thick. They were bedded in clay over a plank base. Presumably this oven rested on wooden piles or cribbing as MacDonald described.

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5. This measurement was derived from the remains of two metamorphosed slate tiles recovered from the hearth of Belleisle House 1.

Spatial and Locational Characteristics

The analysis of spatial and locational aspects of Acadian housing, utilized a sample of 24 houses: nineteen structures recorded from archaeological contexts and five houses known only from the documentary record (Table 1). Variables of size, shape, orientation and fireplace placement were analyzed. Size was defined as the areal extent of each house and was determined simply by multiplying the length by the width. There was a considerable range in house size within our sample. The smallest house measured 14.37 square meters and the largest 94.25 square meters. The average size was 59.16 square meters with a considerable standard deviation of 19.85 square meters. Figure 11 illustrates the variation in the length and width values for the 24 houses.

The trend indicated by this graph is that as length increases so does width. Therefore, the shape of a house can be expressed as a simple ratio of length divided by width. Using this measure a mean ratio of 1.4 was derived; that is, the average house had a length that is 1.4 times its width (a ratio of 1.0 would indicate a square shape).

In comparing the sample variability of Acadian house size to the shape criteria, it appeared that the size of houses varied a great deal more than did the shape. To test validity of this observation we used the statistical measure coefficient of variation. Figure 12 illustrates the result. The size of the houses varied by 33.55 percent. Shape, by comparison, varied by less than half as much (15.71 percent). Simply stated, as Acadian builders varied the size of houses they tended to maintain a similar building proportion. This pattern is very different from that observed in the houses built by Louisiana Acadians in the late eighteenth century. Here a common width was maintained (3.0 to 5.2 meters), larger houses being built longer but not wider than smaller structures (Ancelet, Edwards and Pitre 1991: 28-29).

There was an even stronger trend in the orientation of houses and in the location of the fireplace complex. In a sample of 16 houses,[6] 15 (94%) had their long axis running east-west exterior wall. Of the three remaining houses, one fireplace was centrally located, another was situated on the east wall, and the third was on the north.

The third locational characteristic is the re-use of house sites for later construction. At Melanson, four structures were built successively on the same location, while at Belleisle a house built to replace a burnt structure not only used the same building site, but was built on the original foundation. Testing at Melanson has confirmed this pattern for two additional features.

A factor affecting this pattern may have been a scarcity of suitable building sites. At Belleisle, the surviving Acadian house features are all located on upland

6. This sample of 16 houses uses archaeological information solely. The documentary records cited earlier do not contain information on house orientation or fireplace location.

islands, remnant sand bars from an earlier course of the Annapolis River. These sites, rising 1.0 to 4.0 meters above the marsh, are composed of sands and gravels and offer better drainage than the surrounding marsh with its clay sub-soil. At Melanson, the surviving domestic structures are located on a ridge above the marsh and the obvious geographical limitations present at Belleisle are absent. An additional factor may have been cultural limitations in the form of property tenure or the need to integrate houses within a complex that included outbuildings, kitchen gardens, orchards, animal pens, fences, hedges and perhaps other features. In such a highly structured built environment, a house was but one component.

Synthesis: An Acadian House Pattern

Although this sample of fully excavated Acadian dwellings is small, it suggests a number of trends. The variety in construction techniques identified is not simply the result of different individuals at different times making different houses. Three of the markedly dissimilar houses described were built by the same couple over a fifty-year time span. While the modes of construction that the Acadians used were of European origin, within that cultural tradition individual builders made use of a variety of techniques.

It is also tempting to identify a simple linear progression from earthfast and unframed dwelling to fully framed houses on foundations. However, all of the excavated buildings were constructed between 1700 and 1755, and the dwellings from Belleisle and Melanson must have co-existed. A more realistic model would describe the pattern as one where builders exercised choice and displayed flexibility with respect to construction techniques. This adaptability is reflected also in the re-use of building sites for the construction of successive houses.

It is clear that there were prescribed choices for the orientation of houses, for house shape, and for the location of the fireplace/oven complex. The east-west orientation, and west wall placement of fireplaces, may relate to climatic factors such as prevailing winds, with the fireplace sited as a buffer between the living area and the winter elements. The reasons for a patterned house shape are less clear, but may reflect a cultural esthetic.

Conclusions

The pattern of Acadian house construction during the first half of the eighteenth century emphasized a fusion of Old World techniques with New World conditions–especially those prevailing along the Bay of Fundy salt marshes. This pattern contrasts elements of diversity with those of uniformity. It is our view that Acadian houses resulted from individual builders choosing from a potential palette of construction methods and available materials. Houses built

using these various construction methods co-existed and perhaps to the casual observer may have appeared to be similar. Key to this apparent uniformity was the retention of building proportion regardless of the structure size. This uniformity was further reinforced by the marked preference for siting a house in an east-west fashion and locating the chimney at the west end.

Finally, these dwellings were simply one component in a highly structured built environment, and while we have begun to detail the houses of Acadia, the barns, mills, dykes, and other elements wait to be explored.

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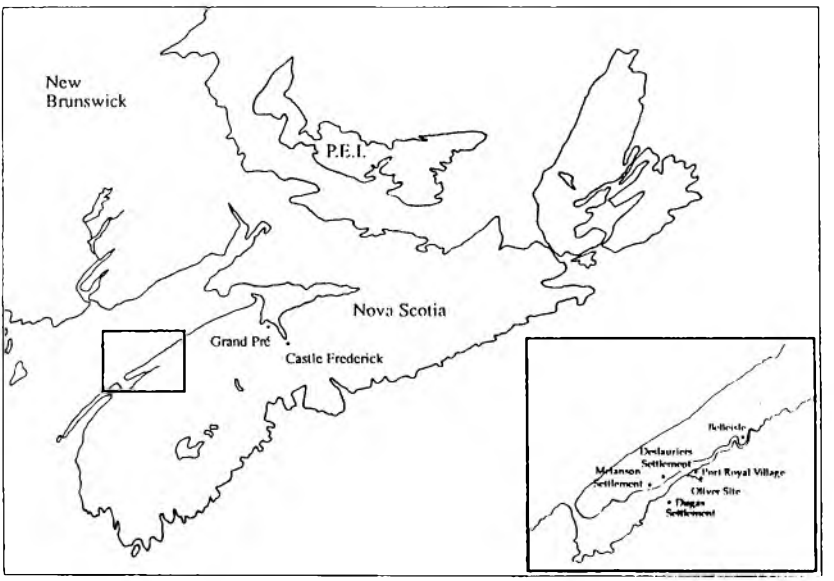

Fig. 1 - Acadian archaeological site locations (A. Crépeau/W. Bona)

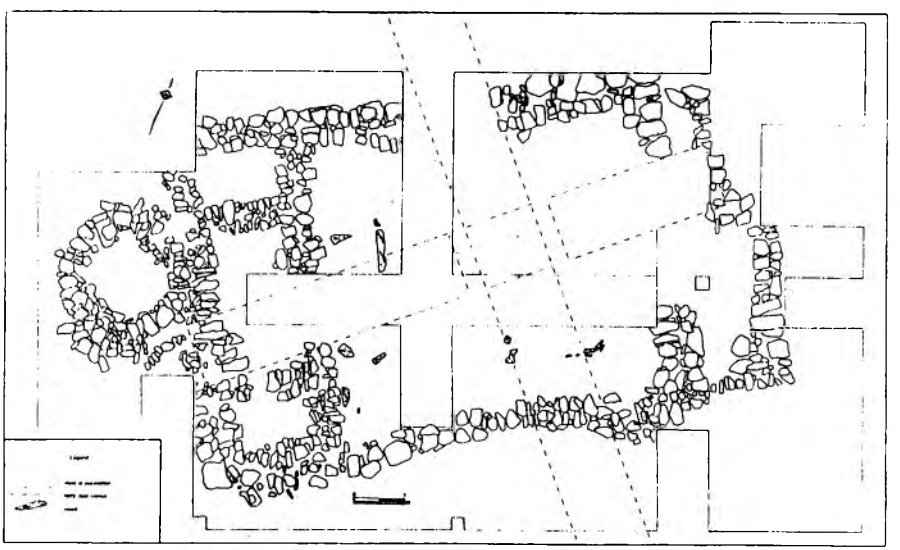

Fig. 2 - Belleisle House 1 structural remains (From: David J. Christianson, Belleisle 1983: Excavations at a Pre-Expulsion Acadian Site, Nova Scotia Museum Curatorial Report No. 48, 22.

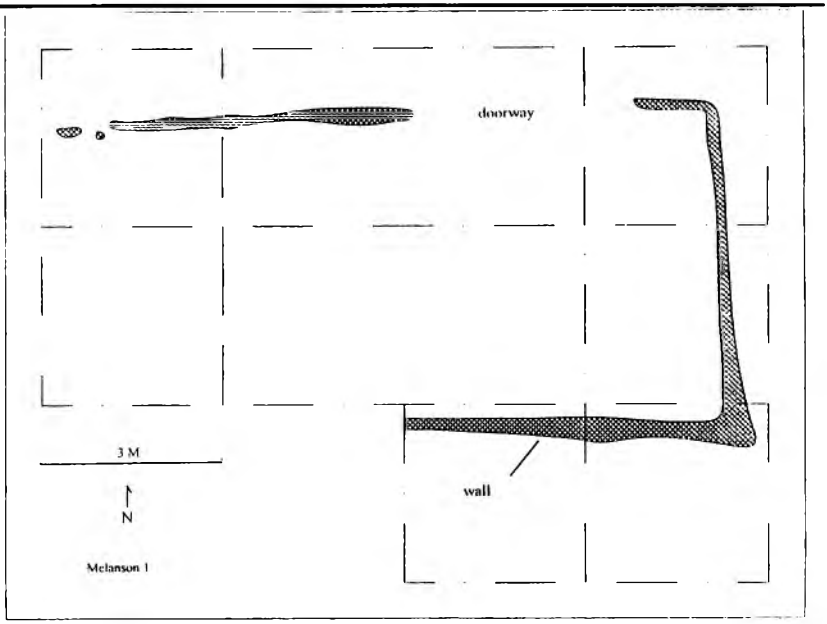

Fig. 3 - Structural remains of the earliest building constructed at Melanson Feature 8 (A. Crépeau/ H. Moses).

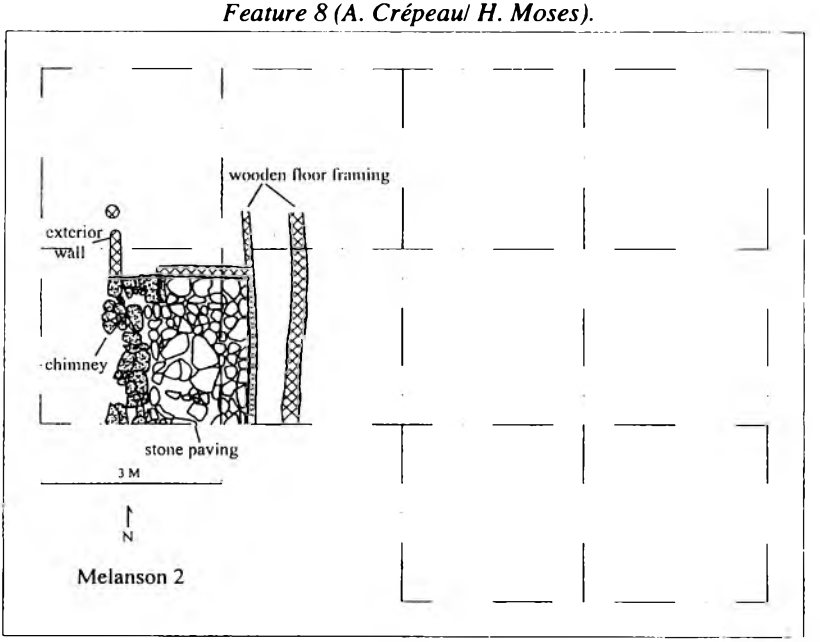

Fig. 4 - Structural remains of the second building constructed at Melanson Feature 8 (A. Crépeau/ H. Moses).

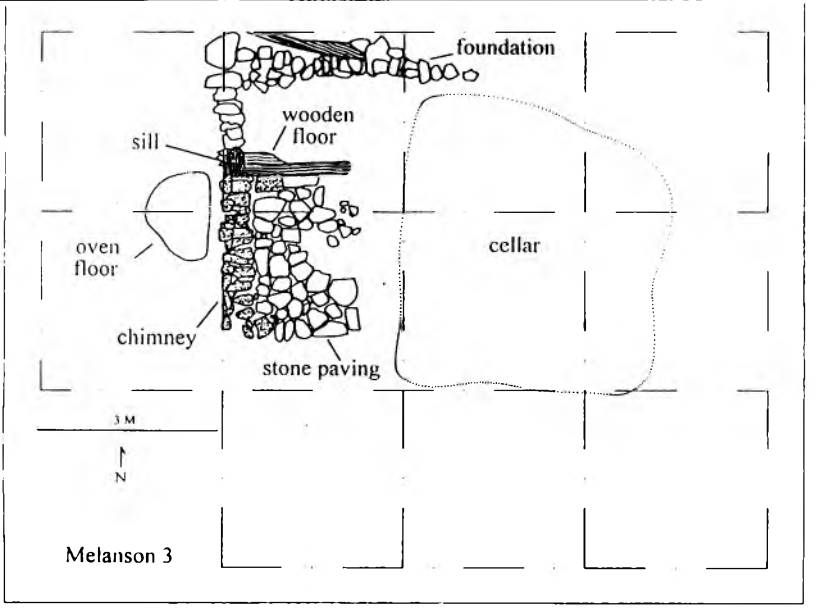

Fig. 5 - Structural remains of the third building constructed at Melanson Feature 8 (A. Crépeau/ H. Moses).

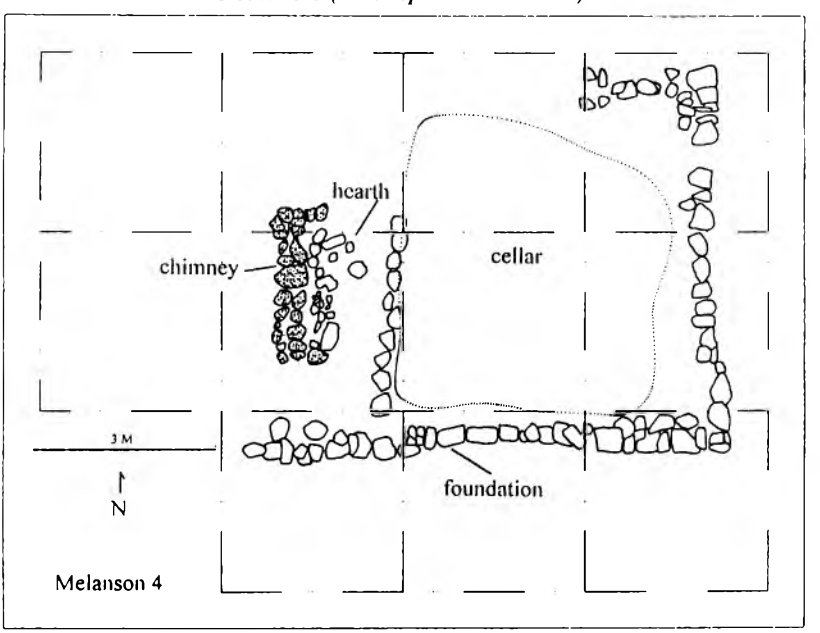

Fig. 6 - Structural remains of the final building constructed at Melanson Feature 8 (A. Crépeau/ H. Moses)

Fig. 7 - Plan dated 1733 of a charpente building on Isle St. Jean, now known as Prince Edward Island. Archives Nationales de France, Outre-mer, Dépôt des Fortifications des Colonies, [hereafter A.N., Outre-mer, D.F.C.] Moreau de S. Méry, F3-290.

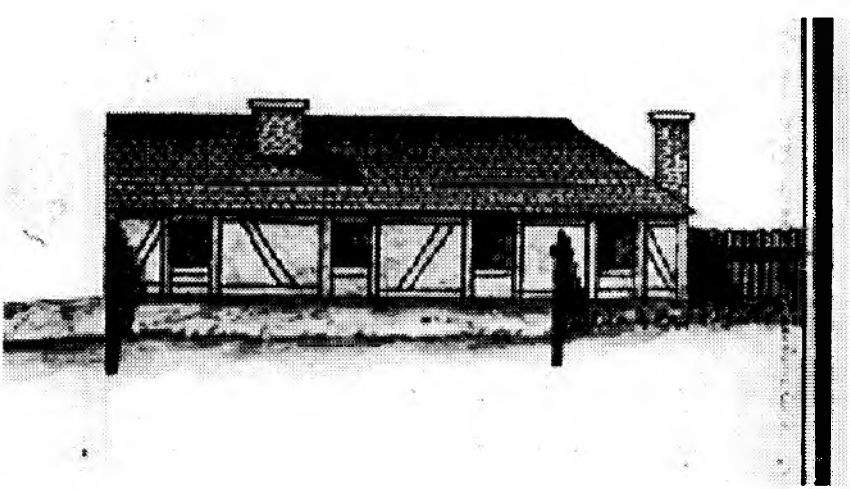

Fig. 8 - An example of a charpente building with a non-continuous sill, from a Louisbourg Plan 1725. A.N., Outre-mer, D.F.C., Moreau de S. Méry, F3-290.

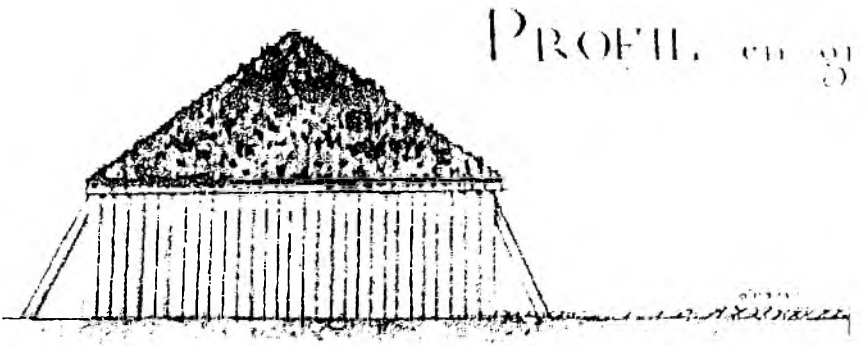

Fig. 9 - Illustration of a piquet building from a Louisbourg plan dated 1740. A.N., Col., C11A, vol. 126, fol. 232.

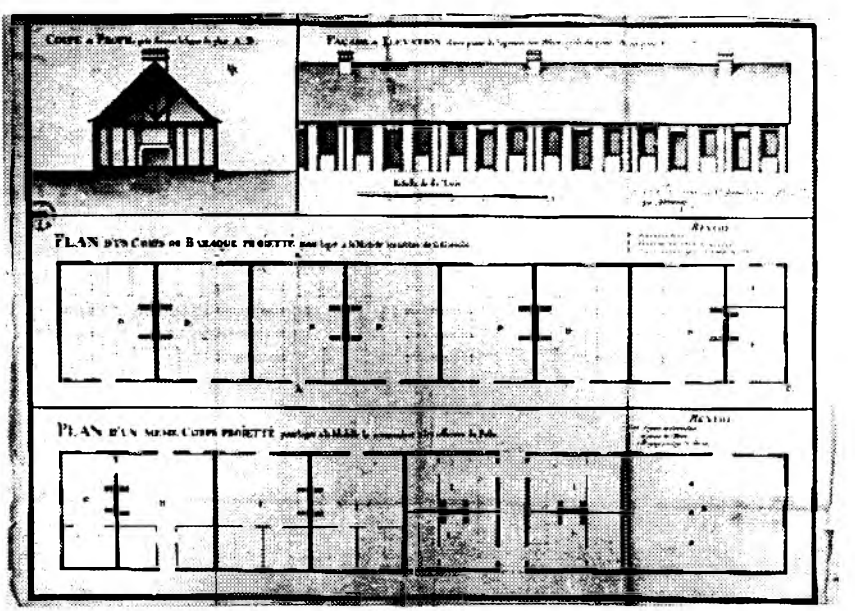

Fig. 10 - Plan of a barracks for Mobile, Louisiana, dated 1745, illustrating a spaced piquet construction. A.N., Outre-mer, Moreau de S. Méry, F3-290.

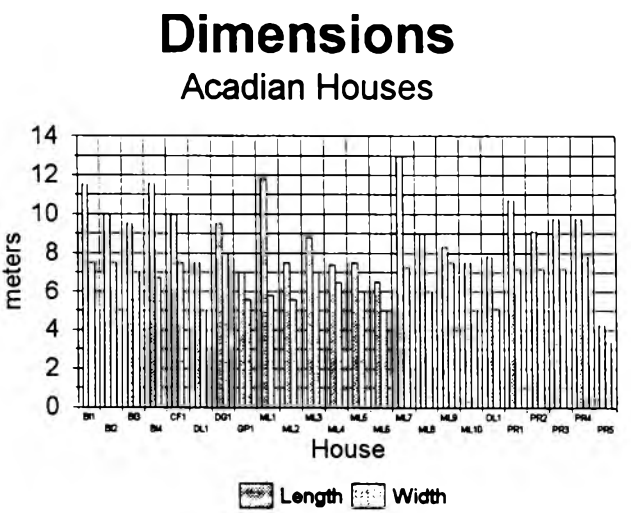

Fig. 11 - Histogram illustrating the length and width values of Acadian houses.

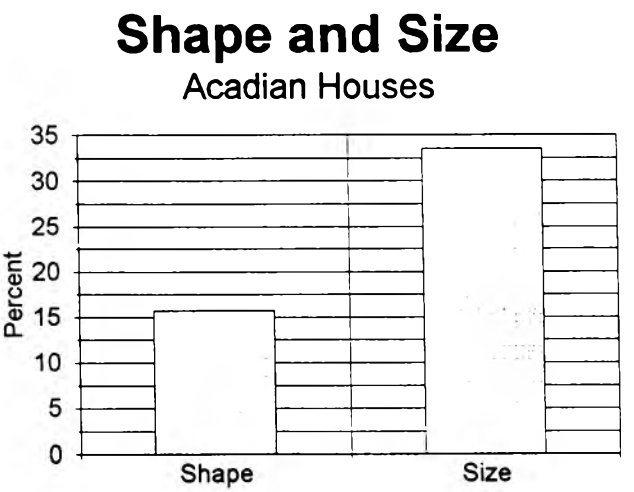

Fig. 12 - Histogram illustrating the variation in the size and shape criteria of Acadian houses.