

FOCUS ON THE GASPÉ: A RICH HISTORY TO DISCOVER

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# Quebec Heritage

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## News



### Mi'kmaq Gifts

First Nation heritage embraces sharing, respect and tradition

### Anglo-Normans on the Coast

Charles Robin, chaloupes and the perils of the truck system

### Outpost of Empire

Early French attempts at year-round settlement

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# Quebec Heritage News

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## VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## *Gaspé in the off season*

by Sandra Stock

**A**pril is supposed to be spring, or at least mainly spring-like, in eastern Canada. However, this certainly isn't always true as we are more likely to go directly from winter experiences—ice, sleet, snowflakes, cold, very cold and extremely cold—to suddenly hot and a lot of mud. On the positive side, the days are longer and there may be a bit of sunshine that actually feels warm.

Two Aprils ago, I travelled to the Gaspé peninsula in late April. From Montreal, it is a fourteen hour, overnight journey to New Carlisle by train. This is when I realized that Quebec is extremely big and our distances give a whole meaning to the word “far.” Not being an easy sleeper, I saw Rimouski at two in the morning and saw the sun rise at Matapédia. There were mainly conifers on bleak hillsides to the left and a vast rather flat Bay of Chaleur to the right. There aren't many signs of human habitation even after leaving the outskirts of Montreal and passing away from the agricultural zone near the St Lawrence. It's still an empty world out there, just full of wild nature.

As this was definitely the low, or “off” season for tourism, our small party of about eleven people had the train to ourselves, especially after Rivière du Loup. No-one got on after Quebec City and there hadn't been many of us starting from Montreal anyway. The food was surprising good and the railway staff really friendly and helpful – easy enough when there were so few passengers! Most of my fellow travellers slept (not me) but, in my favour, neither did I suffer from the slight motion sickness that many felt, as we were rattling around on an

almost empty train.

On the second day of our stay, a few of us traveled by rented van to see The Rock – as in Percé Rock – the iconic symbol of the whole area and one of the best known images of Quebec and eastern Canada as a whole, in tourist promotions and information materials about Gaspé. It was cold late spring with still patchy snow cover on the rather bleak landscape. The Atlantic was really blue under an in-



tense blue sky with the strong northern light of the coast. Although we passed through several small towns and stopped at a few interesting spots like Paspébiac, still a lobster fishing centre, it seemed a landscape curiously devoid of people. The Off Season for sure – no real tourists, and nearly everything commercial that caters to them, shut. This quiet and somewhat lonely atmosphere perhaps emphasized the dramatic appearance (finally, around a headland) of The Rock. Not many natural wonders require capital letters, but Percé Rock certainly merits them. Unlike so many manmade and natural “attractions,” either historic or natural, Percé Rock doesn't disappoint and, at least to me, was much more impressive than I had expected. The area around it has been kept open and only has a few, discrete tourist information or restaurant facil-

ities. The local architecture has been maintained as vernacular, east coast—a good blend of local Québécois and New England. High mountains are seen in the background, behind the village of Percé. Bonaventure Island with its enormous bird colonies rises from the sea less than a mile beyond the Rock.

Percé Rock is classified geologically as a limestone stack. It is one of the largest and most spectacular natural arches in the world. It is 433 metres (1420 feet) long, 90 metres (296 feet) wide and 88 metres (289 feet) at its highest point. The name of course comes from the large, 15 metre (50 foot) arch (hole?) near its seaward end. There used to be two arches, but one collapsed on June 17, 1845. This was a result of natural erosion. Probably, in long geologic time, the present arch will also collapse and possibly new arches will form. Eventually—and this is in the Very Big Picture—it will all erode away, leaving a reddish limestone beach.

At low tide, it is possible to walk right up to the Rock along a sand spit connected to the shore. However, no-one is allowed to climb the Rock. In the early nineteenth century, local farmers grew hay on the top of the Rock but after someone fell off to his death, access to the top was no longer permitted.

There is an element of danger around these kind of formations, even in recent times. In 1990, at London Arch, Port Campbell, Victoria, a similar sea stack in Australia, the collapse of one of two arches, led to this formation no longer being attached to the shore. Two tourists were stranded on the top and had to be rescued by helicopter.



Percé Rock was formed in the Devonian period of the Paleozoic era, 416 to 359 million years ago. It was built up from trillions of ancient sea creatures that died to become calcium based sediments. There are fossils of trilobites and other animals embedded in the Rock. It was the Devonian period when fish-like creatures first struggled up on to the land and developed lungs and legs. So the Rock is really, really old and has been buffeted about through plate tectonics, continental drift, ices ages and so on. It has the air of an ancient sea creature that has endured, and still marks the boundary between sea and land.

*Sandra Stock is the past president of Morin Heights Historical Association and a current Vice President of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network.(QAHN).*

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### Beware those nasty girls

*Translated from the original "Jerry" language, this letter is from the family archives of New Carlisle resident Lynden Béchervaise.*

Jersey, April 26, 1808

My Son,

I received your letter through Captain LeFeuvre last fall. You are no better at writing, although letters are written to you. I thought you would send me some fish at the same time, in return for past favours; but anyhow if you are able to do so later on, do so. Mr Mauger would have taken care of a small package of fish had you had some to send. If you could get me a barrel of cod liver oil on old Chaleur Bay debts (a small one or a large) that would suit me fine. Several people still owe me. Louis Roussy owes me a hundredweight of Marie-Pierre Du Guet Jr, 4%. Take from anyone anything you can get. I am quite satisfied with your staying there this winter. If I were in your shoes, I would remain another ten years rather than return in wartime. You are where money is to be earned;



whereas here your youth would be wasted. There isn't a cent to be made, and we are continually harassed. Furthermore, you would undoubtedly have had to run for your life. How often would you regret not having taken my advice. That is why I urge you to take it; and as long as there is money to be earned over there, do not return home unless we are at peace, of which there is no sign. I myself would like to be well-paid in Canada. I wouldn't return here. No need to tell anyone this. Keep it a secret.

I am not sending you anything. Personal effects are much the same here and there. Where you are, take good care of your possessions, as I have always taught you to do; otherwise, what is the point of earning if you do not economize. You are now earning your own money; you are making good wages. I am satisfied with what you are getting. You would be twenty years in Jersey before you would make the money you do now in a year. Now you can put away £900 a year, and when peace comes you may find employment with some fine person in Jersey, or elsewhere; but here is my advice to you: Beware of those nasty Paspebiac girls, who are libertines almost all of them; they would lead you astray. Avoid them; do not associate with them. I was told that you are courting Jean P's young daughter. I don't believe it. I hope you won't be led astray by that. I would never want to see you again. I hope to leave you some property, but you would not get a cent if you contracted such a union. You have a fine example before you in Jean himself. Those children of his have cost him a

pretty penny. I hope you will be more prudent than that. You have my counsel always before your eyes. Don't forget it then. Keep in the best of company always. You will be better for it. Do not mix with vulgar people and do not tire of helping Mr. Day on a Sunday, as has been your habit. You will be better for it.

Remember me to Mr François Gallie. He is a good man He would do well to marry over there. He would be better off than in Jersey, a thousand times. To Mr Jacques Ahier, as well. If you see Mr. LeMaistre, do not fail to greet him for me. Captain Robin, Mr Day and all in general – French and English. I may be able to go to Gaspé during the year. I have been asked to do so, but I am not yet sure of going. If I decide to go, I will let you know. All your relatives and friends are well. Your Grandmother is still active. She certainly would like to see you, and your cousin Marguerite and all of them. Your uncles are all well. I do not think your uncle Samuel will be going to Gaspé this year. They certainly all would like to see you, but still they would rather see you stay where you are, less you be trapped here. I see by your letter that you received £1.5d on my account. Make good use of it and be careful not to waste your money, which will not happen if always avoid bad company.

I am, with all the tenderness of a father, my son, your dear father,

Philip Béchervaise

My regards to Mr, James Robin and all the Captains.

# SAFE HARBOURS

*Two centuries of English presence on Quebec's Gaspé Coast*

by David J. McDougall

*Adapted from the author's "Two Centuries of Settlement of the Gaspé Coast by English Speaking People," (circa 1985) and first published electronically on the website of the Douglstown Community Centre.*

**B**ecause of the mountainous nature of the central part of the peninsula most Gaspésians have always lived near the shore and there is still virtually no settlement in the interior except for the mining town of Murdochville, which was established in the 1950s.

The written story of Gaspé began in 1534 when Jacques Cartier reported having claimed the land for the French King Francis I when he landed at Gaspé Bay to take shelter from a storm. For about a century and a half after Cartier's brief stay, sailing ships from France made Gaspé Bay their point of arrival and departure for trans-Atlantic crossings. Some brought fishermen from France

who fished for cod. In the very early eighteenth century the French were joined by French Canadians who also returned to their homes along the St. Lawrence River above Kamouraska when the fishing season was over. The fishermen lived for the summer in temporary shacks on the beaches and only ventured far enough inland to cut trees to construct the flakes (low platforms) on which they dried their fish.

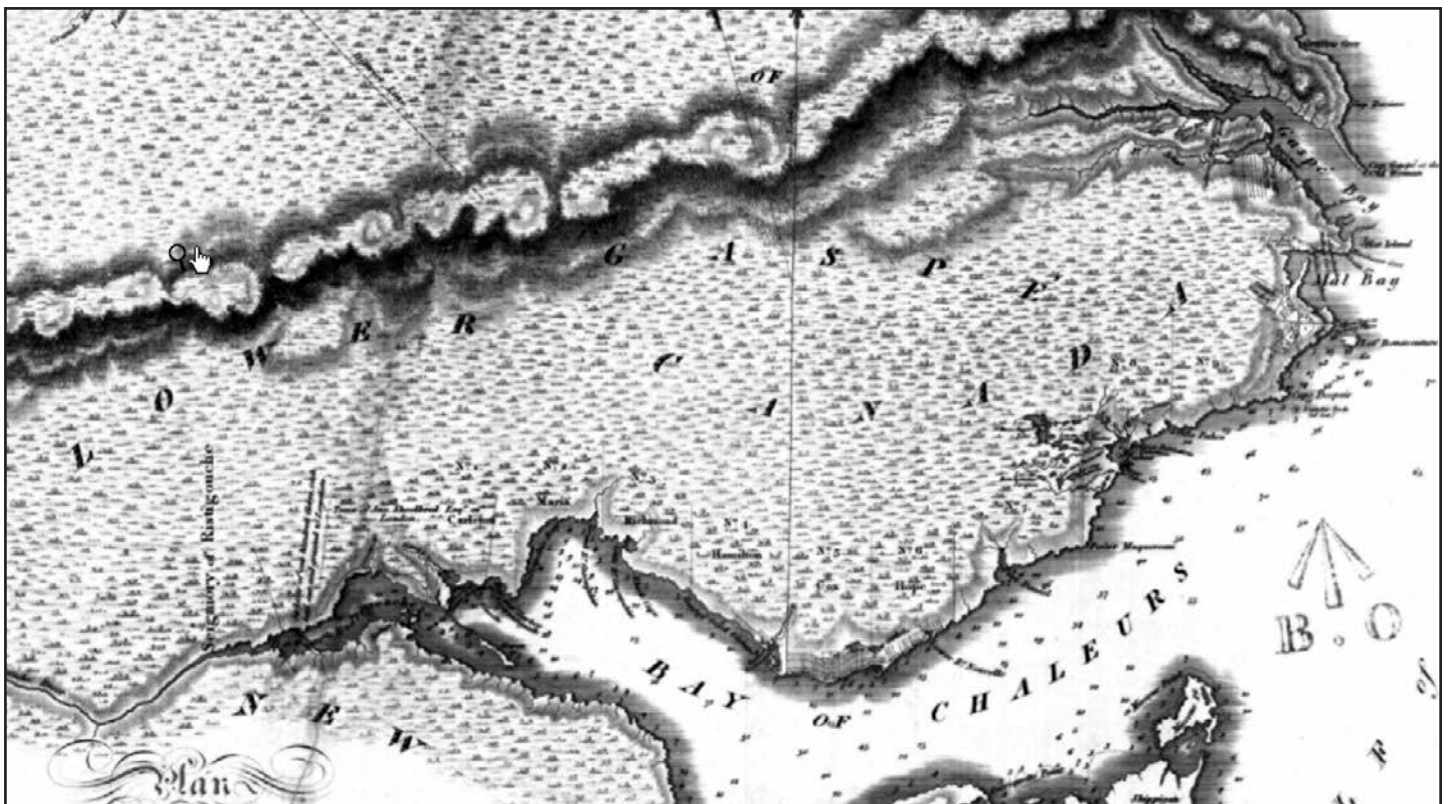
The first viable and permanent communities in Gaspé during the French regime were centered in Gaspé Bay and in the Pabos, Grand-Rivière area, but these were destroyed in 1758 by combined British army and Navy raids on French settlements around the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Thus the year 1762 can be taken as the starting point of continuous settlement of both English-speaking people at Gaspé Bay and Percé and of French-speaking Acadians at Bonaventure and Carleton, then called Tracadiac.

The first English-speaking people to

arrive were merchants, fishermen and somewhat surprisingly, a small number of men called bailiffs who today would be called policemen. In those days, many French-Canadian fishermen owned small sailing vessels called *chaloupes* ("shallops" in local English parlance) which they used for summer fishing, while the majority of the British and some of the Americans came from the vicinity of Quebec City by schooner, a somewhat larger vessel, to fish for Quebec City merchants. Some Americans also came by sea from New England in schooners and sloops to fish for cod and whales.

The mixture of languages and the rough, quarrelsome nature and disregard for any laws by many of the fishermen resulted in a general state of disorder. In 1763, the British government was advised that there was an urgent need for some means of administering justice in later fishing seasons.

Between 1768 and 1771, bailiffs



Section from Joseph Bouchette's 1815 map of Lower Canada showing the Gaspé coast



were appointed to act as policemen at Tracadiac (Carleton), Bonaventure, Paspébiac, Port Daniel, Pabos, Grande Rivière, Gaspé Bay, Rivière de la Magdalene, Mont-Louis and Cap Chat. From Tracadiac to Port Daniel, the Bailiffs were French-speaking and from Pabos to Cap Chat, the bailiffs were English-speaking. Of the English-speaking bailiffs, some are known to have settled permanently on the Gaspé coast, and many of their descendants are still living in Gaspé today. Several merchants acquired land at Gaspé Bay, Paspébiac and Bonaventure in the 1760s, but only a few of them actually became settlers.

The best known, of course, was the Jerseyman Charles Robin who arrived at Paspébiac in 1788 and over the years developed the Gaspé's most successful fishing business. Another was Felix O'Hara from Ireland who settled at Gaspé Bay about 1762 and lived there until he died in 1805.

British soldiers who had taken their discharge in Canada were entitled to grants of land and in 1765 and 1766, at least 70 English, Scottish and American men asked for land on the bays of Gaspé and Chaleur. Almost exactly half of them had been in the 78th Regiment of Foot (Fraser's Highlanders), which had been raised in Argyshire, Scotland in 1755. The remainder were from several other British regiments.

By the 1770s the nucleus of the English-speaking population between Gaspé Bay and Percé was living in a small number of tiny hamlets. There were no roads except trails through the forest and along the beaches. There were no doctors or nurses, so anyone who was sick was probably treated with remedies made from herbs which could be gathered in the forest. There were no stores except for the buildings where the fish merchants kept their supplies, and anything that a family could not manufacture, grow or catch had to come by sailing ship during the summer.

There was one Catholic church at Bonaventure and no schools anywhere. Merchants like Felix O'Hara could send their children to school at Quebec City during the winter but the children of most families could only learn what their parents could teach them, which in most cases was little more than how to fish, hunt, cut wood, cook or sew.

About the middle of the 1770s war between the British and their American colonies led to attacks on Gaspé settlements by armed American sailing vessels called privateers. As a result, many



of the small number of English-speaking settlers left the Gaspé for the supposed safety of Quebec City. In 1777, about the middle of the war, there were at least 150 English-speaking people including about 40 children, living at Gaspé Bay, Mal Bay and Percé and a few more at Bonaventure. Along Chaleur Bay at Bonaventure, Tracadiac and Restigouche, which had first been settled about 1762, there were about 450 men, women and children almost all of whom were French-speaking Acadians and French-Canadians.

In 1775, just before the start of the American Revolution, Sir Guy Carleton, the Governor-General of Quebec had ap-

pointed five army officers to serve as Lieutenant Governors in remote parts of the former French territories in North America. The first of the Lieutenant Governors of Gaspé under the British regime was Major Nicolas Cox of the 47th Regiment of Foot, who had been with his regiment in Nova Scotia before 1758 and at the British capture of Louisbourg and Quebec. Due to the invasion of Canada by the Americans in the fall of 1775 he was not immediately able to take up his post in Gaspé, which he finally reached in 1777. Much of what is

known of the living conditions on the Gaspé coast during the American Revolution and for some years afterwards is in his letters and reports to Governor Haldimand, successor to Carleton, and in his correspondence with Felix O'Hara at Gaspé Bay, as well as O'Hara's correspondence with Governor Haldimand.

In 1777, Lieutenant Governor Cox recorded 631 Europeans settled on the south shore of the Gaspé and 575 fishermen who were there only for the summer fishing season. He organized a militia as a defence against American privateers and obtained cannon to help defend Percé. In 1782, despite the militia's efforts, the crew of an American privateer captured and carried off the smaller cannon and pushed a large one over a cliff after "spiking" it to make it unusable. The British Navy

had too few vessels to be much help against the privateers and the threat of capture kept many merchant ships from coming to Gaspé with supplies. The Acadians along Chaleur Bay, who both fished and farmed, were not seriously inconvenienced by the lack of supplies but many of the families between Gaspé Bay and Percé who did little farming were threatened with starvation.

The war with the Americans ended in 1783 and in the summer of that year a Loyalist named Justus Sherwood was appointed by Governor Haldimand to survey the potential for settling refugee Loyalists on the Gaspé coast. Sherwood estimated that about 1,500 families





England whalers did at that time. The whalers were members of the Annett, Ascah, Coffin, Miller and Thompson families, most of whom had been living on the shores of Gaspé Bay for at least a generation.

Boys of these families, 14 to 16 years old, sailed with the whalers and part of their job was “trying out” the whale oil, by heating pieces of the blubber in large iron pots. Whaling in the Gulf of St. Lawrence had long been practiced by Basques from the border region between France and Spain. And from the beginning of the British regime in Canada to the start of the American Revolution, large numbers of vessels from New England were whaling in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. A small number of New England whalers continued to come to the Gulf of St. Lawrence until about the beginning of the 19th century, but were no longer there when whaling began from Gaspé Bay.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, life in Gaspé was still very much of a frontier existence. For six months of the year, ships from many parts of the world came into the Gaspesian harbours, but for the other six months the Gaspé coast was almost completely isolated by the winter ice in the Gulf and St. Lawrence River. The only schools were at New Carlisle and Gaspé Bay where the students were taught in English and the only churches were at Carleton and Bonaventure where there was a large settlement of Catholic French-speaking Acadians. Protestant couples were either married by a local Justice of the Peace (which at that time was technically illegal) or travelled hundreds of miles to find a minister to marry them or to have a child baptized.

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, English-speaking immigrants came to Gaspé from all parts of Great

Britain. Among the influx of new settlers were farmers and sailors who had been discharged from military service. Many emigrated to North America because they could not find a way to make a living in Great Britain. In Gaspé this new group of settlers caused a sudden increase in the population. By the early 1830s the Gaspesian population had reached about 8,500 and it was estimated that equal numbers spoke English and French.

One group of settlers came from the Channel Islands, near the coast of France. Over the years the Channel Islanders tended to become English-speaking because they attended Protes-



tant schools and churches where English was the usual language. At first, Channel Islanders came to the Gaspé only to fish for the summer or on two-year contracts as clerks (most of who were young boys of 12 to 14 years of age). But by the 1820s there were several permanent settlements of Channel Island men, women and children, mainly at Grand Grève, Percé, and Paspébiac. Settlers from other parts of Great Britain also came to the coast in the 1820s and 30s. To the New Richmond area, for instance, came a number of Scottish Highland families.

In 1842, the provinces of Lower Canada and Upper Canada were united under a single government into the Province of Canada and the two old provinces were referred to as Canada East and Canada West — the nuclei of

the future provinces of Quebec and Ontario. One effect of this political merger was to reduce but not eliminate what had been called the “neglect of government” for the Gaspé Peninsula. The new government tried to improve daily life for Gaspesians by introducing a better judicial system, a militia which could act as a police force, an improved school system, and registry offices for recording of land-ownership deeds. This last change was an important one because, except for the few small seigneuries and a very small number of land grants that had been made in 1760, almost no records existed of who had owned, bought or sold land.

Along with these government services came a continued growth of the population and in the 1840s and 50s a general growth of the fisheries, ship-building whaling and lumbering industries, so that in many ways the period of the 1840s, 50s and part of the 1860s was Gaspé’s “Golden Age.”

By 1860 the population of Gaspé had increased to 24,000, about 55 per cent of whom were French-speaking. Immigration from Great

Britain had nearly ceased and most of the new settlers were French Canadians. These new settlers came to the older settled districts on the south shore and began to populate the north shore of the peninsula which, prior to 1840 had only two or three hamlets over a distance of nearly 200 miles.

A regular government steamship service was begun in the 1850s and what is now the Canadian Coast Guard had its beginnings in the same decade

The economy began to slow down in the middle of the 1860s and a worldwide depression that began in the early 1870s affected the fisheries and lumbering which were the mainstay of employment on the peninsula. It was serious enough that the Charles Robin Company eventually went bankrupt. In the 1880s



many families, the majority of whom were English-speaking, left to go the larger cities of Quebec and Ontario and the northeastern United States where they could find work. Men who had been lumbering went to lumber camps of the Ottawa River and the states of Wisconsin and Michigan.

During the later nineteenth century, two projects were begun which looked as though they might accomplish a great deal for the economy of the Gaspé coast but never lived up to their expectations. The first of these was the construction of a railway from Matapedia to Gaspé Bay, with one of the objectives being to make the great natural harbour of Gaspé Bay into a major Canadian seaport. A government railway which was then called the Intercolonial Railway and is now part of the Canadian National Railway system was completed from Halifax to the south shore of the St. Lawrence River opposite Quebec City in the early 1870s. The Matapedia valley branch line to Gaspé Bay was proposed in 1872, but no work was done until 1885 and only the first 100 miles from Matapedia to Caplan had been completed by 1890.

Almost exactly 40 years from its conception it was completed to Gaspé Bay in 1912. Gaspé Bay never did become a great seaport but the railway provided a means to bring in food and other supplies during the winter and to ship out lumber and fish. Despite this most of such shipments came and went by sea until the 1940s.

The railway also provided a means for Gaspésians to leave in relative comfort during the winter and for tourists of moderate means to visit during the summer. Before the railway, tourists were almost entirely wealthy individuals who came by steamer for salmon-fishing holidays on the Restigouche, Matapedia and Cascapedia rivers near Chaleur Bay, as well as the Dartmouth, York and St. John rivers which flow into Gaspé Bay. Thus the railway was the starting point for the tourist industry which has become an important part of the Gaspesian economy.

The two major wars in the first half of the twentieth century took their toll on the English-speaking population, in some cases because service men died and in others because ex-service men decided to live somewhere else. In both

world wars, Gaspé men volunteered for service in the Navy, Army and Air Force while others served in the merchant navy. Men from Gaspé were in the disastrous attempt to defend Hong Kong against the Japanese, many others fought in Europe. The men in the merchant navy lived in constant danger of having their vessel torpedoed by German submarines.

By about 1920, the English-speaking population had declined to about 25 per cent of the total. Chaleur Bay families engaged mainly in farming while some established on the eastern end of the peninsula continued to fish. Part of the English-speaking population had a tradition of working on sailing vessels and many of these found work on steam-powered vessels as the use of sail power ended. They went where jobs were available, some on deep sea vessels but probably most of them on vessels on the Great Lakes. In order to see their families more frequently, sailors began to move their homes to Montreal and such Great Lake ports as St Catharines, Ontario. This out-migration was accelerated during the depression of the 1930s.

One of the important events in the 1950s was the opening in 1955 of a large copper deposit by Noranda Mines at Murdochville in the middle of the peninsula. In addition to the mine, a copper smelter and a modern town were built for the employees and their families. The original discovery had been made by Alfred Miller of the Southwest Arm of Gaspé Bay and although it took about half a century from discovery to production, he lived to enjoy the fruits of his discovery and died at the age of 104 in 1983.

Continuous out-migration of Gaspésians reduced the English-speaking part of the population to about 12 per cent by 1960. Today, the region's estimated 8,100 anglophones account for less than 10 per cent of the total population, with most concentrated in the same areas first settled by their ancestors: in Gaspé Bay, New Carlisle, New Richmond and near the mouth of the Restigouche River.

*David J McDougall, PhD (1920-2002) was one of the great historians of the Gaspé peninsula, author of countless works on local history, often for The Spec newspaper.*

## Gaspé lumber trade origins

During the 1820 and 30s, a lumbering industry developed along the Baie des Chaleurs. Large trees were felled near the rivers and floated to the seacoast where they were shipped in sailing vessels to markets, most of which were in Great Britain. In one way this was an extension of the lumbering which had begun with the growth of ship-building in Gaspé but in a much larger sense it was part of the trade in Canadian timber from New Brunswick and rivers tributary to the St. Lawrence in Quebec and Ontario notably the Ottawa River.

The Canadian timber trade to Great Britain had gotten its start during the Napoleonic Wars when Great Britain was cut off from its traditional source of wood from ports around the Baltic Sea. Most of the Canadian timber was shipped from either Quebec City or from several posts in New Brunswick and at least part of the lumbering in Gaspé was really part of the industry in northern New Brunswick.

The lumbering was at first along the Restigouche and Cascapedia rivers and later from rivers flowing into Mal Bay and Gaspé Bay at the eastern end of the peninsula. By the 1840s a hundred sailing ships a year were being loaded with timber at Restigouche, most of which was "squared" pine. This meant that after a large tree had been felled, it was cut square with an adze, which made it easier to stack in the hold of a ship.

Other wood was shipped as "deals" which were pine or spruce that had been cut in a saw pit into planks about three inches thick; "staves" which were used in the manufacture of wooden barrels, and "treenails" (sometimes written and pronounced "trunnels") which were small, round lengths of wood which were used instead of iron spikes to attach the planks of the hull of a sailing vessel to the ribs of its frame.

- David J. McDougall

# MI'KMAQ GIFTS

*First Nation heritage embraces sharing, respect and tradition*

by Cynthia Dow

I remember clearly the first time I was truly conscious of my Mi'kmaq neighbours. I was about five or six, and my father took me to what was then known as the Maria Reserve to order some snowshoes. We trudged along a well-worn path in the deep snow to Baptiste Condo's workshop. As we neared the little grey-weathered building, we could hear men talking, laughing, carrying on. But the moment we opened the door, all this came to an abrupt stop. My father, who could be somewhat shy, was even more timid than usual. He and Baptiste exchanged a few words, but no one else spoke. Then Dad and I turned to leave. As soon as the door closed behind us, the talking and laughter immediately resumed.

I asked my father why all those men—there must have been seven or eight in the workshop—had been so quiet. He said perhaps they were shy to speak their language in front of strangers. "What language?" I asked. I knew it was not French, having heard that often enough. "Why, Micmac", my father said. "That is what the Indians speak."

What I knew of Indians came from watching westerns and reading books. I was intrigued, because the people who my Dad and I just visited looked nothing like the skin-clad, feather-headdress-toting warriors that filled the television screen. As the years went by what I learned about Canada's First Nations in our history books also did not seem to describe the people I knew: the high school students I hung out with did not seem to have come from a "primitive tribe". One day I found a piece of ancient Mi'kmaq pottery near my favourite swimming spot, and thus my interest grew even greater—to such an extent that I decided to study anthropology at McGill where I eventually wrote my thesis on aboriginal Mi'kmaq culture.

The Mi'kmaq are the First Nation in Canada with the longest history of contact with Europeans that has survived to tell its tales (the Beothuk having been purposefully wiped out in Newfoundland). Basque, Portuguese and French fishermen started to visit them

along Canada's eastern shoreline many years before the "discoveries" of John Cabot and Jacques Cartier. But despite some 500 years of contact, colonization, and pressures to assimilate, the culture remains strong.

At Gesgapegiag, the aboriginal name for Maria, there are still some fairly unilingual Mi'kmaq elders. There are people in their 50s and 60s who did not speak English or French until they went to school. Today more and more people are practising the old spiritual ways, smudging houses and meeting rooms with sweet grass, carrying out sweat lodge ceremonies, and

offering tobacco after a successful hunt to thank Mother Earth for her bounty.

The language itself is also hanging on, although the thread appears to be thinning year after year. In Gesgapegiag and the nearby larger reserve of Listuguj 40 per cent of the people indicate that Mi'gmaq is their mother tongue and about one-third speak the language regularly at home.

But the proud history of the Mi'kmaq people is not known to all of those who claim that heritage. After all, for many decades now Mi'kmaq children have been students in the same school system as non-

natives, hearing the same misinformation about their own culture: that Indians were "savages" who scalped settlers, "primitive" people with no written language, "uncivilised" nomads who lacked a proper religion.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Mi'kmaq had a written system not unlike Egyptian hieroglyphs, a system later used by missionaries to teach them prayers and hymns. Their highly descriptive language is one of about 55 Canadian aboriginal tongues that belong to the Algonquian family of languages. The ancient Mi'kmaq also left behind many petroglyphs that give us some idea of their way of life before and during the first contacts with Europeans.

The Mi'kmaq were highly politicized. The nation was organized into seven districts, each with a regional chief, and headed by a national chief. One of the best known Grand Chiefs is Membertou, a wise leader who, when he recognized the political power wielded by the



*Mi'kmaq community of Listuguj. Image by Stephane Gauthier*

Catholic Church in Acadia, signed a treaty with the Vatican in 1610. The Mi'kmaq also had extensive international relations, and were part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, which included the Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy and Abenaki. They were also the first nation to sign a treaty with the fledging government of the United States in 1776. The Watertown Treaty still affords them special status today.

Although some of their spiritual ceremonies were organized around the solstices and equinoxes, the Mi'kmaq people did not worship the sun but rather saw it as a symbol of life. They believed in one god, Kji'niskam, and cherished legends of heroes and prophets, helping to pass on the Mi'kmaq values of honour, pride in who they are, respect, humility, sharing, responsibility and giving thanks. The early Christian missionaries turned their great prophet Glooscap into a "liar", and they were told their word for soul, mendu, actually meant "devil". That is one way the painful process of acculturation began.

It is sobering, having been brought up reading our current history books, to go back to the original writings of the first settlers in the New World. I did this in preparing my thesis, and was stunned to discover that the French fishermen and missionaries, far from underestimating the Mi'kmaq and devaluing their culture, praised them highly. They admired their height and strength and stamina, quoted the eloquent speeches of the chiefs at length, were only too happy to adopt many aboriginal technologies such as canoes, snowshoes, and toboggans, and were sincerely thankful for the help and support the Mi'kmaq extended to them.

We do a great disservice, not only to the Mi'kmaq but also to ourselves, when we re-write and re-invent the past. The reality is that our early settlers could not have flourished here without the Mi'kmaq values of sharing and respect, and without their technologies. And not only was the New World changed by our coming together, but also the Old. The Europeans who experienced first-hand the non-hierarchical cultures of the North American natives took the values of free speech and consensus home with them to create parliaments and bring down monarchical and feudal systems that had so limited personal freedom.

Unfortunately, rather than appreciating the many gifts bestowed by our proximity to First Nations such as the Mi'kmaq, our society decided to push them to the margins and try to erase any vestige of their aboriginal cultures. In doing so, we have left immeasurable scars which haunt us today in the form of the highest suicide rate of any cultural group in the world, high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, child abuse. Having your language, culture, and history distorted and devalued hurts, and those hurts result in anti-social behaviour.



This brings me to yet another lesson we can learn from First Nations such as the Mi'kmaq: that heritage has an important role to play in maintaining a healthy community. Michael Chandler, who has done some fascinating research on First Nations in British Columbia, has shown that the astoundingly high rate of suicide in some First Nations communities is directly correlated with destruction of culture. His studies have led him to believe that "...preserving a sense of personal and cultural persistence is a recurring parameter of self-understanding, perhaps common to all human cultures."

Rita Joe, the late poet laureate of the Mi'kmaq Nation, summed up the values of her culture best of all when she wrote "The Solid Part of One's Identity":

In the expression of my tongue  
I say, Kesalin? Do you love me?  
I may say Kesalu'l, I love you.  
Positive words are important  
I do not teach hate  
The solid part of one's identity  
Is communication,  
Exchanging words or touch  
With no animosity towards another.  
I have had positive experience  
The past twenty-two years of writing  
Trying to teach the Micmac way of life  
The majority of the Micmacs are peace-keeping people  
They are gentle people, anxious to please  
I sympathize with my people across the nation  
I admire what they think should be done  
But do not think a militant attitude should be used  
The solid part of our identity is sharing  
That is why we are here today  
We are survivors.

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# OUTPOST OF EMPIRE

## *Early French attempts at year-round Gaspé settlement*

by David Lee

*Adapted from "The French in Gaspé, 1534 to 1760," (1970) published by the National Historic Sites Service, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 3.*

Jacques Cartier landed in Gaspé Bay in 1534 and raised a huge cross bearing three fleur-de-lys and the words, "Vive le Roy de France." When a Mi'kmaq chief protested that the region was his domain, Cartier assured him that the cross was meant only as a landmark for ships in the harbour. Yet, from that point on the French considered Acadia, Gaspé and the St. Lawrence to be theirs, though they were continually faced with intrusive challenges from other Europeans, notably the English and the Scots.

Nearly every armed conflict involving the French in America was felt in the Gaspé. In 1613 the English captured Port Royal and sent the inhabitants in boats to Gaspé where they found French fishing ships to return them to France. In 1628, four vessels bound for Quebec with 400 colonists were forced to land in the Bay of Gaspé. The commander, Claude de Roquemont, had heard that the English under David Kirke controlled the St. Lawrence. France had sent the expedition without a naval escort, so when de Roquemont eventually left the bay to try to reach Quebec, all his ships were taken. Kirke destroyed the French cargo stored at Gaspé but took two of the French ships back to England.

Another expedition took Quebec in 1629 and New France was not returned to the French until 1632. Emery de Caen was named commandant and sent to reclaim the colony, landing in Gaspé Bay on 6 June and at Quebec a month later.

Other wars in Europe, including that between William III (of Orange) and

Louis XIV, seriously affected New France and the Gaspé in particular. In August, 1690, two corsairs, most likely authorized by the colony of New York, pillaged and destroyed the ships, fish, missions and villages on Îles Percé and Bonaventure. A month later, William Phips destroyed the tiny settlement at Petite-Rivière (in Baie-des-Morues).

French fishing vessels occasionally visited Gaspé during the next 23 years of almost constant war and many were cap-



tured. In 1711, an immense expedition led by Sir Hovenden Walker was sent to seize Quebec in reprisal for Franco-Indian raids. Bad weather forced him to take refuge in the Bay of Gaspé. Here he found only one French fishing vessel, which he burned. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) provided the French with 30 years of peace to resume development of Canada and Gaspé, but by then they had lost most of Newfoundland and Acadia.

The fisheries of Gaspé were envied by New England and regarded as an important consideration for going to war

again with France. Gaspé Mi'kmaq observed this European madness for cod with great amusement. But unlike Indians in other European colonies, those of Gaspé were never enticed or forced into participating in the hunt for cod or in the wars for it.

In the 1720s, the French began the great fortress at Louisbourg to protect the Gulf of St. Lawrence shipping entrance to Canada and at the same time they came to realize the strategic importance of Gaspé. Although they did not erect fortifications during the War of 1744-48 and the Seven Years' War, they maintained a vigilant lookout there to forewarn Quebec of the approach of English ships. Nevertheless, in 1758 Wolfe levelled the growing fishing establishments at Grande-Rivière, Pabos, Gaspé Bay and Mont-Louis, destroyed 36,000 quintals (hundred-weight) of fish and transported hundreds of settlers to France.

This time the English kept Gaspé. By 1760, Acadian refugees had gathered at the mouth of the Restigouche River. Many stayed and multiplied on the south shore but many also moved northward along the coast. Here they were joined by several families who had lived in Gaspé before the Conquest. By 1765, there were more than 200 Europeans settled on the south shore and over 100 at Gaspé Bay—a third of whom were English.

Typically, development in New France required fur trade for a capital base and agriculture for a population base, and Gaspé had the potential for neither. There was one resource, however, in which Gaspé and Newfoundland did abound and for which speedy delivery to Europe was an asset: cod fish.

Although ice conditions prevented a winter fishery such as New England enjoyed, Gaspé did possess other requisites

for a winter fishery such as New England enjoyed, Gaspé did possess other requisites

for a successful industry. Cod could be caught close to shore and this was an advantage not only for its convenience but also because coastal cod was smaller and thus better for drying.

Settlement began in New France in the seventeenth century, and accounts left by traders, colonizers, colonists and missionaries document the early development of the Gaspé fisheries. Catholic France had a large market for fish and large domestic supplies of salt to make possible the green cod fishery for which the Grand Banks of Newfoundland were so suitable. Green curing involves salting the fish right on board ship and permitted ships to hurry home as soon as they were full. Newfoundland was the New World fishery nearest to the French channel ports of Honfleur, St. Malo and Le Havre.

But when the fishermen of southern France entered the New World fisheries, they found that it was more difficult for green cod to survive the longer voyages to their more southerly ports of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Bayonne and La Rochelle without spoiling. Thus they adopted the technique of dry curing which required more men and an elaborate (and thus lower and costlier) process of drying cod on land. This process required less salt, leaving more room on ship for fish, and enabling France to supply her southern provinces while developing a valuable export trade to the Catholic countries of the Mediterranean. The harbours and beaches and the smaller cod found there made the Gaspé coast ideal for the dry-cure process.

There was some government interest in the 1720s in developing other Gaspé resources, but nothing came of it. In 1724, two agents for the French navy reported “a considerable stand of fine pine and spruce proper for masts” in Chaleur Bay, but a sample sent to France subsequently failed inspection. The French never again tried to exploit the region’s considerable timber resources.

Explorers of the New World were always on the lookout for rich mineral deposits. One of the first projects to attract the enthusiasm of Jean Talon, In-

tendant of New France, was a lead mine near Gaspé Bay. He had a party of workmen including a German engineer sent from France in 1665 to spend several months digging for the ore. Serious accidents and two deaths plagued the project and in the end not enough ore was found to merit continuing. From 1729 to 1734, a group of Quebec entrepreneurs expended considerable effort trying to develop a slate-works at Grand-Étang on the northern shore of Gaspé. But the quarry failed when it could not produce slate of good enough quality or price to compete with slate imported from Europe. Neither of these mining ventures attracted any permanent settlers.

The early voyages to the Gaspé peninsula apparently came with the intention of trading for furs as well as fishing. The first year Europeans are known to have wintered in the region was that of 1615-16 when five men from La

or five sections and re-assembled by carpenters, who were also fishermen. In 1675, two typical ships going to the dry fisheries were *Le Simbole de la paix* of 220 tons, which carried 70 men and *le Bannière de France* of 205 tons which carried 65 men. Every *chaloupe* used in the fishery required about five men—two on the beach and three in the *chaloupe*—so French ships were always encumbered on the outgoing voyage with up to 10 or 12 *chaloupes*. The large vessels proved easy prey for pirates and enemy ships.

As settlement developed in New France, the rewards of the Gaspé cod fishery became more inviting. A cheaper source of cod would benefit both the colonists and consumers in the mother country. But French fishermen were slow to take advantage of the local Canadian market, even though it could usually bring higher prices at Quebec than in France.

For years the French tried to encourage a permanent, sedentary fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, including the Gaspé coast. They hoped that a sedentary fishery would provide a more dependable supply of dried cod to Canada and thus more stable prices. A sedentary fishery that put Canadians to work would also offer alternative employment for the colony’s *coureurs de bois*. At least 15 seigneuries were known to have been granted and re-granted between 1653 and 1707 in the

Gaspé. But few seigneurs ever visited or used their concessions, simply keeping them for speculative or prestige purposes.

There were some remarkable exceptions, however.

An early attempt to establish a sedentary fishery was made at Mont-Louis cove on the St. Lawrence River, 75 miles downstream from Matane. Here, at the end of the seventeenth century, Denis Riverin formed elaborate plans to establish a fishery with a sound agricultural base able to support a large resident population. Riverin was born in Tours about 1650 and came to Canada in 1675 as



Rochelle were left at Matane to trade with the Indians. But the fur trade depended on good river transportation and, of course, on good furs, both of which were lacking in the Gaspé. Fur trading thereafter would always be of minor importance in the region, with greater profits to be made from fishing.

Financing a vessel engaged in dry fishing, however, was expensive and risky. The seasonal voyage involved transporting large numbers of fishermen, their provisions and equipment, including *chaloupes*—20- to 25-foot-long fishing boats carrying sail and oars—back and forth across the ocean every year. Some *chaloupes* were brought over intact but others were transported in four



secretary to the Intendant, Duchesneau. He had long been interested in the fisheries of New France, and in a few years he left the government service to try his luck at them. The government wished to encourage him but all it did over the next few years was grant him four seigneuries in the Gaspé and one in Labrador.

Riverin's idea was to combine agriculture with fishing to provide the post with a more solid, diversified and self-sufficient economy. He believed that Mont-Louis would become "one of the most considerable establishments in the country." In 1699, he had brought a total of 53 people to Mont-Louis, including nine heads of families and six young unmarried men. The next year he had 26 families and a total of 91 people. Most of the men were apparently expected to engage in at least two activities. These were usually farming and fishing but there were other combinations of specializations: stonemasons, carpenters, sawyers, blacksmiths, beach-masters and even a surgeon. One Michel Arbour, who had just married the 13-year-old daughter of another fisherman, is listed as a fisherman-blacksmith-carpenter.

In 1700, Riverin reported a busy population blissfully harvesting crops, tending livestock, fishing and cutting timber in the new sawmill. But apparently, most of the settlers returned to Quebec that autumn, and never came back. By 1725, the Quebec merchant Louis Gosselin owned the Mont-Louis

seigneurie; in that year he reported only two families resident there. Neither were descendants of Riverin's original settlers.

Louis Gosselin or his heirs must have sold the seigneurie around 1750 to one Michel Maillet, who succeeded in reviving the settlement until it was ravaged by the English under Wolfe. In 1758, Mont-Louis was a small but thriving community of 40 to 50 souls. Maillet seems to have prospered from it for he was willing and able to offer a ransom of 3,500 *livres* to keep it. All the cod not consumed by the community itself was presumably sold at Quebec and must have represented a contribution of some importance to the economy of New France.

In 1672, Pierre Denys, in association with the prominent Quebec merchants, Charles Bazire and Aubert de la Chesnaye, was ceded the seigneurie of Percé, which included about a square league of the mainland opposite. Talon and Frontenac agreed that it was a promising location for sedentary fishery, and in 1676 the concession was confirmed.

Although operations seem to have begun almost immediately, we have no record of a truly permanent or sedentary fishery there until at least 1676. Denys' detailed inventory of his establishment at this time reports that four men, a Recollet priest and a married couple were resident there. He also reports several buildings at Percé and Petite-Rivière (in

Baie-des-Morues), including a storehouse 90 feet long, a few cattle, a large garden and over 100 acres cleared and ready to cultivate.

Charles Bazire died in December, 1677, and by then Denys was in serious financial difficulty as a result of his large family and the disability of blindness. During the 1680s, the settlement grew only slightly. La Chesnaye seems to have lost interest and Denys' only hope was government assistance.

Pierre Denys' affairs were assumed by his son, Simon Denys de Bonaventure, and it was he who tried to maintain his father's claims to the seigneurie of Percé. War broke out in Europe in the spring of 1689, and that summer French fishermen were harassed by English corsairs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and at Percé. The fishermen returned the next year and six ships were seized at Percé when it was captured and razed by the English. The Percé fishery never recovered—no permanent settlers ever returned to fish there and the number of summer fishermen from France declined.

The Percé fisheries never had more than five families permanently resident. Pierre Denys' great plans for extensive settlement never progressed very far but the population remained quite constant. In the decade between 1678 and 1688, some families left but others arrived to replace them, maintaining the year-round population between 20 and 30. In the summer the population was swelled by 400 to 600 fishermen.

Fishermen from many ports of France participated in the dry fishery, but Pierre Denys recorded that there were none better than the Basques. He claimed that one *chaloupe* manned by Basques could catch better than three times more fish than one *chaloupe* manned by any other fishermen. Fishing from a *chaloupe* required skill both in fishing and in seamanship. Six days a week, even in the rain, they would sail out in their fragile *chaloupes*, often to fish far from shore. They fished with lines baited with cod entrails, or bits of capelin, mackerel and herring caught earlier by nets. At day's end they hurried ashore to unload their catch.

The Percé fisheries seem to have had a lot of troubles. The fishermen had little to do with their free time but gam-





ble and drink. Wine was one of the men's few diversions and they drank it in their cabarets: temporary structures which they faithfully erected every year upon arriving at Percé. The gaming, fighting and carousing on Sunday were a source of great scandal to the local missionaries.

When selecting sites to settle, the French had to choose the most favourable combination of terraces, beaches and gentle slopes, as well as proximity to fishing ground, good harbours, protection from attack by the English, length of fishing season, fur trade potential, and agricultural potential. After the English destroyed French fishing establishments at Percé in 1690, defence was considered more important than fish stocks, so the focus of the fisheries shifted northward to Gaspé Bay, where French fishermen could hide from predatory English warships.

During the 30 years' peace (1713-44), the fisheries of Gaspé Bay flourished, though it was not until the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-48) that the first wintering appears to have been attempted. A Canadian named Arbour was reported to be cultivating wheat, buckwheat, hay and various vegetables with some success. He is noted as a permanent resident of the bay and was probably the first of European ancestry.

By 1754, war was a serious threat again. This time there would not only be fishing ships to attract the English to Gaspé Bay, but the attractive plunder of a permanent settlement. The French settlement at Gaspé Bay is scarcely mentioned in the official French correspondence of the times, though Governor Duquesne estimated in 1754 that there were "at least 300 inhabitants including wintering fishermen."

After years of inattention, suggestions were made for a naval station there to patrol the gulf and control its shipping. The bay itself would be fortified to protect the fisheries and the settlement. An army post could serve as a base for invasions southward into English territory. But nothing was done, and settlers fled into the woods when Wolfe attacked on September 4, 1758.

It is significant that a community of at least 300 souls could develop and

thrive on its own initiative in the Gaspé. This sort of development was rare in New France, for normally the government extended its paternal hand into all aspects of life in the colony. This must surely have resulted in a certain spirit of independence among the inhabitants.

The twin communities of Pabos and Grande-Rivière also became more than typical Gaspé fishing stations under the French regime: they grew into substantial settlements of resident fishermen. They were served in the 1750s by two or three missionaries and the parish registers for the years 1751-55 provides us with the names of nearly 100 residents of the area. Many ships came from France every year to fish or buy fish caught by local fishermen.

Jean-François Lefebvre de Bellefeuille and his sons François and Georges were the only Gaspé seigneurs who lived on their land for a long period. Even though their seigniorial grant was for the area around Baie-de-Pabos, the family seems to have settled people along the coastline from Pabos to Grande-Rivière. Thirty years of permanent residence must have given them particular knowledge about the character and resources of Gaspé that made their settlement succeed.

The English made no estimate of their numbers because Bellefeuille and many of his settlers fled into the woods when the English troops arrived in 1758, and were never taken. However, since the English burned 27 houses at Pabos and 60 at Grande-Rivière, there must have been at least 200 people in the community. We do not know their fate, except that François Bellefeuille was still alive in 1765, when he sold his seigneurie to Frederick Haldimand.

Jean Barré of Granville in Normandy was noted as a prominent resident as early as 1747, when he was entrusted with organizing a guard and lookout in response to the threat of English attack. He is noted variously as a habitant, fisherman and ship's captain. In the Gaspé context, "ship's captain" most likely indicates he owned his own fishing vessel, something larger than a mere *chaloupe*.

As well, there would be the *maîtres*

*de chaloupe* who, in the Gaspé context, probably owned their own *chaloupes* or were entrusted with one by another owner. Then there were the *maîtres de grave* who were responsible for allocating beach lots and directing the drying operations there.

In retrospect, the government at Quebec had no intention of discouraging sedentary fisheries in Gaspé but when the interests of the sedentary fishermen and those of the visiting fishermen conflicted, it gave precedence to the latter, whenever it had the power to do so. As a result, the Gaspé fisheries were less within the influence of the government of New France than they were within the economic orbit of Old France or even their own independent little world.

Whereas fur traders and other entrepreneurs in Canada received special privileges and aid, fishermen settled in Gaspé with no government help or even encouragement; and yet by the 1750s their numbers had grown to 500 or 600. Gaspé's isolation and its peculiar geographic characteristics had fostered the growth of a frontier spirit of independence and self-policing.

It is interesting to note that only a few years later the English recognized the distinctiveness of Gaspé: under the English, the Gaspé would have its own lieutenant-governor until 1833.

By the 1760s, France's Atlantic fisheries were producing 800,000 quintals (hundredweight) of fish annually worth 12 million *livres*. The great size and efficiency if the industry had allowed the French to compete favourably in both domestic and export markets. Train oil derived from the cod was important to the flourishing French woollen industry. Besides employing 20,000 men the fisheries were also vital to the French kingdom for their contribution to the Royal Navy. The fisheries stimulated the ship-building industry and dried cod was a staple provision of the navy. More significant, the fisheries were considered "the nursery of the navy."

The peace treaty of 1763 left France with only the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon and certain beach rights in Newfoundland. This represented only a third of their former extent of coastline. And Gaspé's dried-cod trade was now in the realm of British control.

# STAMP OF THEIR BAILIWICK

*Revisiting the Channel Island connection to Canada's east coast*

by Yves Frenette

*Adapted from "The Anglo-Normans in Eastern Canada" (1996), translated from the French by Carole Dolan and published by the Canadian Historical Association, Canada's Ethnic Groups Series, No. 21.*

Despite their small numbers, Anglo-Normans played a decisive role in the social development of eastern Canada. In Newfoundland, Labrador, Cape Breton Island, the north shore of the St. Lawrence, New Brunswick and the Gaspé, their trade activities often led to permanent settlements, and helped shape societies that were closely tied to the fishing industry.

And yet the memory of Anglo-Normans survives only in eastern Canada. West of the Gaspé Peninsula, they are unknown. For Quebecers, Ontarians or Albertans, "LeMoine" or "Mauger" are merely French-sounding names. What Canadian would be able to link the names of John Bourinot, founder of the Royal Society of Canada, or General Brock, hero of the War of 1812, to the Channel Islands?

Collective memory and, to a certain extent, historical scholarship, has focused on negative images of the "Robins," as Anglo-Normans in Acadia and parts of the Gaspé are still called. They are blamed for holding back regional development and mercilessly exploiting poor fishermen reduced to slavery. Anglo-Normans have at times been portrayed as the "damned English." But for each entrepreneur, there toiled hundreds of humble An-

glo-Normans, patois-speaking or bilingual.

To coin a delightful Jersey expression, Anglo-Normans left "the stamp of their bailiwick" where they lived.

The Channel Islands are a dependency of the United Kingdom with a separate government. Over the years, Jersey and Guernsey, the two largest islands in the archipelago, became home to thousands of French political and religious refugees, as well as seasonal and permanent workers. In the twentieth century, English became predominant in the Islands, gradually replacing French, the language of the elite, and Norman, the idiom of the popular classes.

Early on, the Anglo-Normans became adept at protecting their islands from the almost relentless military conflicts between France and England. By the sixteenth century, Jersey and Guernsey prospered through their semi-official status as warehouses for French and English trade goods, through their legal and illegal trade, and through their involvement in the commercial adventures of two of the New World's colonizing countries. Increasingly, the Channel Islands' economy relied on the fishing, shipping, contraband and piracy. Jersey prospered through the North American fisheries which, beginning in 1730, became the driving force of Jersey's economy.

Anglo-Normans were early comers to the fishing banks of Newfoundland, the oldest written record dating back to 1591. The importance of the North American fishery grew when the new Governor of Jersey, Sir Walter Raleigh, encouraged Island merchants to equip their ships for the new lands. In 1713, the French departure from the southern coast of Newfoundland, following the Treaty of Utrecht, led to an expansion of Channel Islands trade in the region. In 1731, Jersey firms employed seventeen ships and 1,500 men in eastern Canada. In 1765, Anglo-Normans comprised ten percent of fishermen in Newfoundland where a worker could earn as much as £20 a season, compared to £3 at home.

Many Anglo-Normans came to Canada as officers and seamen during the Seven Years' War and the War of 1812. However, it was fishing and its related trade activity that continued to attract Anglo-Normans to eastern Canada after the Conquest. Each year, fifty or so Jersey vessels manned by 2,500 men fished off the coast of Canada, considered by many Jersey Islanders to be a distant extension of their own island. Carteret and Priault, DeQuetteville, Nicolle & Co., LeMesurier, DeGruchy and many other business firms competed with English and French companies.

Anglo-Normans moved quickly into the Gulf of St. Lawrence after Canada's final cession to England in



Map showing the location of the Channel Islands. Image courtesy of the Cape Breton Museums Network



1763, taking advantage of their knowledge of French to form economic ties with the Acadians. Anglo-Norman merchants settled on Cape Breton Island, in the Gaspé region and New Brunswick. Among them, the brothers Philip, Jacques (John) and Charles Robin established Robin, Pipon and Company of Isle Madame in 1765 and John Robin & Co. soon after. At first, these businesses enlisted the services of seasonal Jersey fishermen, but quickly transformed their Arichat trading counter on Cape Breton Island into a sedentary fishery post. In 1766, the youngest Robin brother, Charles, explored Chaleur Bay and established trade relations with the Acadian and aboriginal peoples, and with other traders who had arrived earlier. Charles returned the following year and did business on both shores of Chaleur Bay establishing a small post on a Paspébiac sand bar which was destined to become the company's headquarters. Charles traded with the Acadians, the Mi'kmaq and seasonal fishermen from New England—salt, liquor and other commodities were exchanged for fish, furs and fresh meat. He developed a clientele by advancing the fishermen goods that they would reimburse with the next year's catch. In the years that followed, this practice enabled him to expand his market by regularly increasing the size of his clientele.

Charles Robin had no difficulty putting pressure on the Lieutenant-Governors of the Gaspé Peninsula. The first incumbent Nicholas Cox took up his duties in 1777 while deeply in debt to Charles. His successor, Francis LeMaistre, was a Jersey native and also a friend of the family. With their help, Charles had a customs office opened near his headquarters in Paspébiac and acquired vast stretches of land as well as strategically located shoreline property. He was also commissioned on various occasions to act as judge or investigator, positions he filled to protect his own interests. Furthermore, he helped elect politicians to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada who would pander to his interests and unscrupulously undermine his opponents. At the turn of the nineteenth century, he was one of the most powerful figures in eastern Canada.

During this era, the competitors of Charles Robin on the shores of the Gaspé included small Anglo-Norman merchants, especially those from Guernsey, such as

Helier Bonamy and Nicholas LeMesurier in Gaspé Bay. These two men settled in the region with their families and workers shortly after 1763. However, they were unable to compete with the larger companies, notably the Janvrin brothers, who bought them out in 1792. The Bonamy and LeMesurier families remained in Gaspé Bay where they were joined by other small fish merchants from Guernsey. These small merchants acted as intermediaries between the fishermen and the large trading company. They also hunted whales. Some, like the Simon family of Indian Cove, operated flour and saw mills. The Guernsey Islanders established small Protestant communities whose geographic isolation preserved their ethnic identity, including their Norman patois.

In 1789, the brothers Francis and Philip Janvrin expanded into the Gaspé, where they soon had some 200 clients and several trading counters. Their ships also sailed the shores of New Brunswick. For approximately fifty years, the Janvrin brothers held shares in the Robin company and were involved in other Anglo-Norman operations, notably that of Carteret Priaulx. In 1820, the Janvrin brothers were the largest Jersey Island outfitters. They gradually disposed of their fishing operations, however, to concentrate almost exclusively on banking and financial activities by the mid nineteenth century. Other companies were established soon after; among the most important were William Fruing (1832), John LeBoutillier (1833), LeBoutillier Bros. (1838) and later, John Fauvel and John and Elias Collas.

These establishments could be enormous. In Paspébiac, Percé and Grande-Rivière in the Gaspé Peninsula, Jersey merchants owned vast domains covering several hundred acres, with woodlands and dozens of buildings where they stored large quantities of dried cod as well as tackle, provisions, tools, hardware, dried goods, clothing, shoes and furniture. The manager lived in a dwelling set high on a hill where he could survey everything happening on land and sea. The establishment could also include a bakery, a farm, a shipyard and a public house. These companies all relied on the same system of credit-dependency among fishermen-clients. Italy, Spain, Portugal, Brazil and the British Caribbean were their primary markets, but eastern Canadian cod was also sold in the United States, Jersey, England, as well as domestically.

The division of labour in these establishments was highly sophisticated. Almost all skilled labourers, journeymen and seamen came from the Channel Islands. Most were farmers or farm workers whose wives and children looked after the farm in their absence. These men left Jersey after the spring communion and, hoped to return in time for the harvest. Some fished and worked as boatswains, most laboured eleven hours a day on the beach as cod gutters and salters.

The economic power of the Jersey merchants com-



bined with political and social power. In the Gaspé, John Gosset, nephew of Philip Robin Jr. and the company's senior manager in Canada, was elected to political office. Like David and John LeBoutillier, the latter was also a member of Canada's Legislative Council in 1867.

The Anglo-Normans also dominated the local scene, wielding an influence far beyond their faint demographic importance. Many of them owned small fishing operations or a business and, although not wealthy, their standard of living surpassed that of the rest of the population. In 1871 the small group of notables from Griffon Cove, north of Gaspé Bay, included four Jersey Islanders, among them the mayor and an alderman. Elsewhere, they served as sheriffs, customs officers, justices of the peace, school commissioners, municipal and school board secretaries, postmasters and telegraph operators.

Themselves Protestant, Anglo-Norman merchants looked down on the "Papists" in their midst. Whenever possible, Charles Robin & Co. hired no Catholics except as fishermen. When Philip Jr., nephew and heir of Charles, married Marthe Arbour in 1811, with whom he already had two children, the Robin family refused to acknowledge the union and no favours were shown to the children who, raised in the Catholic faith, were disinherited. Other companies hired Catholics but Jersey Islanders employed by the Fruing Company and suspected of succumbing to Catholicism were sent back to their native island. Aware of the Church's power, the companies nevertheless maintained cordial relations with the clergy. The merchants and their managers generously helped build and decorate Catholic churches, and also loosened their purse strings at parish bazaars. Relations between Anglo-Norman immigrants and other segments of the population were generally marked by tolerance, where Anglo-Norman settlers were too few to comprise a community, they mingled with their neighbours. They shared the same trade, bought goods from the same stores and even danced at the same weddings. Because Anglo-Norman women were scarce in eastern Canada, Jersey and Guernsey immigrants most often chose spouses outside their ethnic group to avoid marriage between relatives. Almost invariably, the Jersey settler was

assimilated. Those surrounded by Irish or Acadian peoples became Catholic churches, especially when the services of Protestant missionaries were unavailable. Though Anglo-Normans comprised a majority of the population in mixed religious communities like Mal-Bay in the Gaspé their preference for Protestant wives led them to assimilate with anglophones.

In the changing world of the late 19th century, Anglo-Norman firms faced serious problems resulting from their reliance on outdated practices such as line fishing. The arrival of steamship and rail transport also struck blow by fueling competition. Refrigeration technology made it easier to ship fresh products, and so dried cod lost its appeal. It was also more difficult to satisfy fishermen-clients who demanded an increasing variety of consumer goods. The profits from import-export operations declined. Similarly, it became difficult to balance "good" as opposed to "bad" debts. The companies gave credit to insolvent persons, and raised the costs of production while lowering consumer prices, all this in an unfavourable international environment.

In 1886, the collapse of the Jersey Commercial Bank toppled the foundations of eastern Canada's Anglo-Norman firms. DeGruchy and his associates in Newfoundland, and Charles Robin and LeBoutillier Bros. in the Gulf, went under. One by one, Anglo-Norman fishing companies disappeared, the largest joining forces with Canadian interests. Such was the case for the LeMesurier family, the LeBoutillier Bros. and even Charles Robin & Co. which, following several reorganizations, moved its headquarters from Jersey to Halifax in 1904, amalgamating two years later with the firms A.G. Jones and A. H. Whitman. The new entity operated under the name Robin, Jones & Whitman. From 1912 onward, it concentrated on the retail aspects of its business by establishing a chain of department stores.

With few exceptions, Anglo-Norman interests had disappeared from eastern Canada in 1930. Robin, Jones & Whitman declined for half a century before finally closing shop in the 1980s. Beginning with the Great Depression, Anglo-Norman immigration to eastern Canada all but ceased. An unknown number of Jersey Islanders returned to their homeland or emigrated to other parts of Canada and to the United States. Around 1950, only a few dozen residents born in the Channel Islands remained in eastern Canada; a quarter century later, the group was on its way to extinction.

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*Editor's note: In 2002, interest in the Quebec's Channel Islands heritage prompted the founding of the Gaspé-Jersey-Guernsey Association, dedicated to the collection of artifacts, documents and other information relative to the history of the early Channel Islands settlers.*



*Robin, Jones & Whitman Store, L'Anse a Beaufile (2008), now operating as a summer museum. Photo: Rod MacLeod*

# OWE MY SOUL

## *A brief history of the Jersey truck system on the Gaspé coast*

*Adapted from "The Anglo-Normans in Eastern Canada" (1996), by Yves Frenette, translated from the French by Carole Dolan and published by the Canadian Historical Association as part of Canada's Ethnic Groups Series; and from "Two Centuries of Settlement of the Gaspé Coast by English-speaking People", by David J. McDougall.*

From the early years of the nineteenth century till the beginning of the twentieth, the Jersey "truck system" of exchange between merchants and fishermen affected many families of the Gaspé coast. "Truck" is derived from the French verb *troquer* (to trade), and this system was widely used in many industries including fishing, lumbering and mining in North America and parts of Europe during the nineteenth century.

The Jersey truck system relied on the dependency of fishermen-clients. Large fishing companies would give fishermen credit throughout the year to buy merchandise such as fishing lines, hooks and salt, as well as clothes and food for their families. To secure their loans, Anglo-Norman merchants registered debt instruments and mortgages on the fishermen's lots in an amount equal to the amount of merchandise advanced. The loan was repaid in dried and salted fish at the end of the fishing season.

The advantage of the system to the fish merchants was that they had a known source of supply, while the fishermen had a known market. But when the high price of supplies exceeded the return on their fish, fishermen ended the season in debt, and were practically forced to work for the same company the following year. If a man was not a good fisherman or bought more than he could reasonably hope to pay for with his labour, he was continuously in debt and literally "owed his soul to the company store." The result was that many fishermen and their families had to work very hard to make a very poor living; and many fishermen-clients were forced to mortgage or sell their operations following one or more consecutive seasons of poor catches.

Foreclosures also took place. In extreme cases the fishing companies found it necessary either to seize a fisherman's property or require him to work without pay on their sailing vessels on trans-Atlantic voyages. More than a few had to work for the Jersey Islanders in winter, cutting and hauling wood, building and repairing boats, or manufacturing barrels. Other fishermen prospered, however, and were able to stay out of debt. And the farmers, salmon fishermen, whalers and boatwrights rarely seem to have been dependent on credit from the fishing companies.

To maximize their profits, Anglo-Norman companies used dubious means. When grading the cod, they would require the fishermen to supply a few extra pounds per hundredweight if their fish were poorly dried and mouldy. They also took advantage of their clients' illiteracy. When

clients came to the company store to settle their debts, a clerk read them their account out loud, interpreting it as he pleased. Trilingual, the clerks conversed among themselves in Norman patois so English or French-speaking clients could not understand them.

Accumulating debt was not always negative, either, and the best producers were often the most indebted, while others never or very rarely incurred debt. In some places, Anglo-Norman companies were unable to take control of independent fishermen who sold their catch to the merchant of their choosing, without taking on debt. Indeed, "coasting" merchants had always given Anglo-Norman merchants competition by stealing their clients. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the growing number of permanent or seasonal merchants restricted the Anglo-Norman firms' freedom of action by forcing them to pay better wages, offer a better price of the fish, give more generous advances and ask a lower price for their merchandise.

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth, relations between Anglo-Norman companies and local lay and religious elites soured as the latter began to assert their local and regional influence. Some merchants grew to despise the Catholic clergy with its notions of temperance, agriculture, education and cooperative enterprises. The growing number of zealous priests gave the Catholic Church better control. Gradually, the large Jersey firms even stopped selling liquor in their stores.

The lay elites were also becoming more aggressive. The regional petty bourgeoisie used politics to limit the influence of company managers. Slowly, these managers lost their regional and local dominance. One telling example is the fact that William LeBoutillier-Fauvel, the grandson of Jersey businessmen and senior manager of LeBoutillier Bros., owed his election to the House of Commons in 1891 to the powerful Liberal organization mounted by the parish priest of Bonaventure, *Napoléon Thivierge*.

But the elites were not alone in challenging the authority of Jersey companies. On at least two occasions, local populations revolted. In Chéticamp, Nova Scotia, in 1879, the forced evacuation of several families of squatters living on land owned by the Robin firm triggered a riot and the departure of the Jersey manager. Thirty years later, a popular uprising shook the small Gaspé community of Rivière-au-Renard. Dissatisfied with the price offered by Jersey companies, local fishermen found another buyer who sent a schooner to collect their catch. But after dealings with the Jersey Islanders, the schooner left without a single cod on board. As a result, fifty or so fishermen showed up at the Fruing store and violence ensued. A clerk shot at a fishermen and the mob retaliated by turning on employees. At the companies' request, the federal government dispatched a frigate and two military detachments. Twenty-two fishermen were brought before the courts and sent to prison.

# KING OF COD

*Netting year-round Gaspé settlers was Jersey fish-merchant's historic legacy*

by Betty Lemaistre

**W**hy would anyone want to leave the lush, prosperous, semi-tropical island of Jersey and sail for weeks half-way around the world to reach the cold, empty and desolate Gaspé Coast on the eastern seaboard of Canada?

Charles Robin very much wanted to, and the story of the Jersey connection on the Gaspé is very largely the story of the Robin Company he founded, and its successors. The majority of the present inhabitants of the region owe their existence to the men – and a few women – who made their way to a new life on “La Côte” to work in the fisheries established by these companies.

In 1758, James Wolfe, fresh from his participation in the siege of Louisbourg, was given the mission of destroying the French fishing establishments on the Baie des Chaleurs, and destroy them he did. He sailed into the Bay, set fire to the buildings and drove off the inhabitants. We are told that most of them escaped into the forest and managed to survive somehow, possibly by linking up with the Acadians. The site of a French fishing village at the Bourg de Pabos has been excavated and is open to the public in the summer.

The following year, Lower Canada came under British rule, and the stage was set for the involvement of a Jerseyman in the Gaspé fisheries.

Born in St Aubin, Jersey, the youngest of three brothers, Charles Robin (1743-1824) had undoubtedly heard of the money to be made off the fisheries in the North Atlantic. In fact, one of his brothers had been to Newfoundland and seen that the fisheries there were becoming overcrowded. Also, he must have heard stories of the old French fisheries on the Atlantic Coast of North America, and so he persuaded his family and his relatives, the Pignons, to invest in them rather than in

Newfoundland. In 1765 the three brothers joined with two other family members to form the Robin Pipon Company. Their first investment was the purchase of a brig, the *Seaflower*, and Charles and his brother John went to Cape Breton Island to investigate the potential of the old French fishing establishments near Louisbourg. In the



next two years the company purchased two more ships and expanded their operations to the coast of the Gaspé. Charles Robin and Company and its successors date the birth of the firm to 1766, the year of Robin's first visit to the Gaspé Peninsula. That made it the second company to be founded in Canada, after the Hudson's Bay Company.

When he returned to the Gaspé the following year, Charles Robin was 23 years old. He had scouted the Baie des Chaleurs well the previous year and had recognized Paspébiac as one of the choice sites for the drying of fish. This tiny port became the North American headquarters for his fishing company.

There was a barachois (a triangular sandbar enclosing a lagoon) which was ideal for the small shallops used in the inshore fishery; they could be quickly beached on the sandbar or taken through the narrow passage into the sheltered waters of the lagoon in case of a storm. There was no protected harbour available for the larger ships, but the anchorage was secure: even in the heaviest gales his ships would not drag their anchors along the bottom.

On 2 June 1767, Robin landed in Paspébiac after an unusually long trans-Atlantic crossing of some eight weeks. He had sailed from Jersey to Arichat, his brother's post in Nova Scotia, where he picked up some lumber he needed for construction purposes, and then continued on to Paspébiac. This was very late in the season and he had no time to waste. Ideally, he should have been there in early May in order to buy the best fish and have time to fill his ship's hold and send her off to Europe before the weather became too cold. To quote David Lee's *The Robins of Gaspé*:

When Charles Robin finally landed at Paspébiac at 3 o'clock in the afternoon of 2 June 1767, his patience could bear no further delay. Within two hours he was afloat again in a shallop headed up the Bay to talk with Acadian fishermen at the nearby barachois of Bonaventure. Robin got there before dark and negotiated all night, arranging to trade them salt in return for dried cod. He left Bonaventure at daybreak, was back in Paspébiac by 8 o'clock in the morning, loaded his shallop with trading goods, and set sail again at 11 o'clock southward across the Bay to Caraquet, where he arrived at 5 o'clock. He spent the next day (June 4) trading hardware and salt for “thirty quintals

*Charles Robin. National Archives of Canada*



dry codfish and sundry kinds of furs". He left Caraquet at 3:30 the next morning and returned to Paspébiac. The following day (June 6) Robin was off again in the shallop, this time to trade with the Acadian fishermen at Tracadigache and the Micmac Indians at the mouth of the Restigouche River.

With that kind of energy, small wonder that Robin's firm was still in operation more than 220 years after its founding.

Life in the fisheries on the Gaspé was not easy during the last years of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Robin had to contend not only with the normal fluctuations of the market and the varying availability of cod, but also with the wars that broke out from time to time. He lost his markets in the United States during the British American War of 1812-1814. American warships came into the Bay and he was forced to close down for a couple of years. As well, he had to do his best to keep abreast of developments in Europe in order to be sure that he was sending his vessels to friendly ports when they left Paspébiac in the autumn. On more than one occasion when the British were at war with the French he fitted out his captains and crews with French uniforms and equipped his ships with French flags so that if they were challenged by a French warship, they could claim to be French. After all, the men all spoke French fluently. It is interesting to note that his captains were not eager to call at British ports: they were terrified that their crew would be taken by the press gangs and forced into the British navy. Ships would sail from Paspébiac to Portugal, for instance, and then any of the passengers who wanted to go home to Jersey would have to book passage on another ship.

Who were these fishermen and sailors who worked for Charles Robin and Company? Some of them were the men who had disappeared into the forest when Wolfe attacked and had subsequently been absorbed into the Acadian settlements along the Coast. As well, a certain number of men came from the Quebec City area every summer because

there was work for them in the fisheries. But Robin also brought with him from Jersey each spring a number of Jerseymen, particularly skilled workers, such as carpenters and shipwrights and, very importantly, men who knew how to "make fish". In the early years they would return to Jersey for the winter.

When his establishments became more substantial Robin and his employees began to stay year-round on the Coast. In fact, from 1783, with the exception of a few weeks in Quebec City in 1787, Charles Robin did not leave the Baie des Chaleurs area for nineteen years. He spent the winters of 1767-68 and 1768-69 at his brother's establishment at Isle Madame on Cape Breton Island where he found congenial company among the Acadians, especially the young ladies. When not visiting or dancing, he occupied himself in cleaning up his brother's buildings, cutting firewood, mending sails, brewing beer, trapping rabbits and fighting a large army of rats that was threatening to devour everything in the storehouse.

Robin soon had a monopoly of the fisheries on the Bay. There was a firm of Guernseymen farther to the north for a time, but they were not serious competitors. At a later date, Janvrin, another Jersey company, took over the fishery off Gaspé. Janvrin had been employed by Robin and was trained in his methods, so it was a friendly sort of collaboration rather than out-and-out competition. Their respective fishing grounds did not overlap.

Robin needed ships to transport his increasing output, so he brought out a shipbuilder from Jersey and constructed ships at Paspébiac at the rate of about one every two years. He and his successors built 16 ships in all between 1792 and 1824. He set up a chain of stores at his fishing stations along the Coast to supply fishermen with whatever they needed for their boats and their families. Everything functioned on the truck system: no money changed hands. The fishermen would come to the store in the spring to get what they needed for the summer's fishing, and then they brought their cured or raw fish to Robin to pay for it. This was a universal way of doing business at the time. It was abolished in England in 1831 when the Truck Law was passed, obliging every employer to

pay his employees in cash.

The arrival of hundreds of Loyalists to the Baie des Chaleurs in 1784 alarmed and irritated Charles Robin. Until then, except for customs duties, he had not had to worry about any government regulations. He had been able to fish where he pleased, erect buildings wherever he wanted and cut timber wherever he found it. Now, land titles became important. The Loyalists were not the passive Acadians he was used to dealing with, but rather aggressive English-speaking settlers who knew their rights. He quickly became disenchanted with the Loyalists; he found them to be quarrelsome, ungrateful and unruly malcontents. To his immense relief, by the following year many of them had left seeking better farmland farther west.

In February 1787 the Legislative Council in Quebec took under consideration a projected ordinance to regulate the fisheries of the Gaspé Coast. Charles Robin was not invited to the hearings in Quebec, but if the government was going to impose fishing regulations, he wanted to be there. The only way to reach Quebec from Paspébiac in the middle of winter was to walk. There were no roads except for farm tracks in the populated regions on the south shore of the St Lawrence, but Robin was determined. So he walked to Québec and back, 300 miles each way. He left Paspébiac on January 8, 1787 and crossed the St Lawrence on the ice-bridge at Quebec on February 2. The trip had taken him 20 days. He spent the next three weeks meeting and dining with various government officials, including Lord Dorchester. The government eventually passed an ordinance which was quite favourable to his Company.

It is worth noting that whereas the governments of New Brunswick and Newfoundland had for many years been paying bounties to their fisheries, nothing of the kind had ever been paid to anyone in Quebec. It was only because the superior quality of Robin's "Gaspé Cure" was recognized everywhere that he could compete in world markets. The Newfoundland fisheries were, after all, 200 miles closer to Europe than he was.

After spending so much time politicking in Quebec, Robin was anxious to get back to Paspébiac where there were

many things still to be done before the ice broke up in the Bay. It took him three weeks to walk back through the Matapedia Valley to his home base. He was travelling with a group of four or five—possibly Acadians—and one of them was probably carrying the mail. To avoid having to struggle through the dense forests they followed the frozen rivers and hugged the edges of the lakes. He fell through the ice once but escaped serious injury.

So he continued for a total of 31 years. When he left Paspébiac for good on 28 September 1802, his company had extended to include general stores and fishing stations all along the Gaspé, with a few in Cape Breton and at least one on the Lower North Shore of the St Lawrence at Magpie. His company was exporting somewhere in the region of 15,000 to 17,000 quintals (equivalent to 112 pounds) of dry cod each year to ports in Europe—principally Spain, Portugal, and Italy—and the coast of South America.

Robin never married. His successors in the Company were his brother's three sons. When he died on 14 June 1824 at the age of 81, he left assets worth about £22,500.

The second generation of Robins directed the Company affairs on the Gaspé until 1814 when it became expedient for the family to send a non-family manager to Paspébiac. The owners never again returned to the Gaspé but left the direction of Company business to a succession of loyal and efficient managers. The owners kept a long-distance eye on their affairs from Jersey. During the nineteenth century a number of competitors established themselves along the Bay, notably the Le Boutillier Brothers, three brothers who had worked for Robin before striking out on their own. Their buildings in Paspébiac constitute the major part of what is left there today.

A typical Robin establishment would have consisted of a general store, a house where the manager lived, a warehouse for dry fish, and a stage (or landing platform) where the fish were brought ashore. There would also have been a large area on or near the beach where flakes for drying the fish had been erected. These were waist-high frames on which the split cod would be spread out to dry.

Paspébiac was the headquarters. The Robin and Le Boutillier installations on the barachois resembled a small town. Each company had a warehouse four or five storeys high, a general store, a wharf, a carpenter shop, a sail loft, a blacksmith shop and forge, a cooper shop for making barrels, offices, a cook-house, a boarding house for the apprentices, and numerous other buildings, besides the large area given over to the flakes and the drying fish. Set on the hill away from the fishery there were the Robin farm buildings and a large house, known as The Park, where the General Manager lived.

The ownership of the Company underwent a number of changes and mergers during the nineteenth century. In 1886 their financial backers, the banks in Jersey, failed. There was a riot in Paspébiac and the store was looted when the Company could not pay its fishermen. The government had to intervene. It was at this time that the firm became Charles Robin Collas. In 1924 they absorbed Le Boutillier Brothers. Robin, Jones and Whitman, as the Company was most recently known, at one point operated a string of seventeen establishments on the Gaspé, three in New Brunswick on the south shore of the Baie des Chaleurs, seven or eight on the North Shore of the St Lawrence, and three in Cape Breton.

A triangular voyage evolved over time. Ships would leave Paspébiac laden with dry cod bound for ports in the West Indies and South America. There they

would take on cargoes of rum, molasses and sugar for Europe. From Europe they returned to Paspébiac with manufactured goods. The market for dry fish disappeared almost completely during the twentieth century; the Company processed frozen fish for a number of years, but eventually that was given up as well.

There was a disastrous fire in 1964 that destroyed most of the original Robin buildings on Paspébiac Beach. The remaining ones on the site, which include the large Le Boutillier Bros warehouse, form the Site Historique du Banc de Paspébiac.

*Betty LeMaistre is a former director of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, representing the Gaspé Jersey-Guernsey Association, and the past president of the Montreal chapter of the Royal Commonwealth Society. She divides her time between Montreal and her home in New Carlisle.*

**Sources:**

Lee, David. *The Robins in Gaspé, 1766 to 1825*, (Fitzhenry and Whiteside), 1984:18. Lee's book is based to a large extent on Charles Robin's journals and letters. Robin kept a detailed account of everything he did and all the transactions of his company during the years that he lived and worked on the Gaspé Coast. Some of the originals are owned by the *Société Jersiaise in St Helier*, some are in the British Museum,



and some are on microfilm in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. In addition, over 300 volumes of company correspondence covering the nineteenth and part of the twentieth century are in the Public Archives of Canada.

Syvert, Marguerite. *Everyday life on the Coast of Acadia and in the Province of Québec, 1767-1787*. Société Jersiaise Annual Bulletin, 1976.

## BARQUES, BRIGANTINES AND BRIGS

### *Shipbuilding on the Baie des Chaleurs*

by Kim Harrison

The demand for timber and cod was instrumental in the development of the shipbuilding industry on the Gaspé coast in the eighteenth century. Gaspésians realized that the future could be made more secure by harvesting the rich forests to build vessels and in turn use these vessels to transport fish and lumber products to the hungry European and Caribbean markets in return for items such as tea, molasses, sugar, salt, tools and equipment that could not easily be produced in the Gaspé.

Timber was being shipped from the coast as early as 1760 in the form of boards, planks, hoops, staves, masts and logs. The Seven Years' War in Europe and the American Revolution effectively cut off Britain's supply of naval lumber and forced her to depend more heavily on Canada to fill her needs. It is estimated that between 1818 and 1822 an average of 5,013 tons of wood per year were shipped from the harbours of the Gaspé Coast, mainly to Britain. These ships also carried cod, salmon, eels, cod oil, flour and furs and often returned home fully loaded or, during the Seven Year War, were sold to the British Navy once they had reached their destinations.

Between 1762 and 1895 there were at least 460 ocean-going vessels built on the Gaspé Coast; most Gaspé-built vessels were registered as brigantines and schooners, with some brigs and barques. The schooners were mainly "British Plantation" built, with one deck and two masts. Red pine and cedar were the most popular woods used in these boats, although fir, silver and yellow birch were also utilized.

Several shipyards existed along the coast, with the longest-running and highest-producing being that of Charles Robin & Company of Paspébiac, operating from 1791 to about 1900. Although many locals built schooners to transport fish and other supplies to Quebec City, the Caribbean and Europe, the vessels were simply too small to carry the large

cargoes generated by Robin's commercial empire. In 1791, master shipbuilder James Day arrived from the Isle of Wight to aid the company in designing and building ships of up to 249 tons burthen. These would be the first of many large square-rigged (barques and brigs) sailing vessels to be built on the coast.

According to historian David McDougall, Day had ship carpenters working under him, some of whom were local men. In addition there were sawyers whose job it was to cut planks, lumbermen cutting timber in the forest, blacksmiths and probably sail-makers. No evidence has been found that there were other trades associated with shipbuilding such as rope makers and block makers; it can be assumed that some of the items needed to complete the rigging of the vessels were brought in from England, Quebec City or Halifax.

The first boat was launched in 1792 and a long line of schooners, barques, brigantines and brigs designed by Day followed. On average a new ship took to sea every two years between 1791 and 1830. Day went on to build a gristmill and become a Justice of the Peace before he died in 1833.

Within a few years of Day's arrival other ship yards producing square-rigged vessels were established at New Richmond, Bonaventure, New Carlisle and Corner of the Beach. Square-rigged vessels were mainly used for trans-Atlantic voyages and sold in Great Britain, or were used by fish merchants to ship their dried and salted fish to Portugal, Spain, Italy, the West Indies, and South America

As the number of these vessels increased so did the number of schooners. Schooners were usually used for more local voyages carrying dried fish and supplies between the various fishing communities or for voyages to Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Quebec City and Halifax. The more important schooner building centres were at Carleton, New Richmond, Maria, Bonaventure, New Carlisle, Paspébiac, Mal Bay

### Robin, Jones & Whitman establishments circa 1940

#### Gaspé Coast

Bonaventure  
Paspébiac  
Port Daniel  
Anse-aux-Gascons  
Newport Islands  
Newport Point  
Pabos  
Grande-Rivière  
Ste-Thérèse  
Anse-à-Beaufils  
Percé  
Barachois  
Malbaie  
Gaspé (two stores)  
Anse-à-Griffon  
Rivière-au-Renard

#### New Brunswick

Caraquet  
Shippegan  
Lamèque

#### Nova Scotia

Cheticamp  
Inverness  
Musquodobit Harbour

#### North Shore

Magpie  
Thunder River (Rivière-au-Tonnerre)  
Sheldrake (Port-Cartier)  
Eskimo Point  
Seven Islands (Sept-Iles)  
Mingan.  
St John River



and Gaspé Bay.

In New Richmond, William Cuthbert established a shipyard at Duthie's Point, which became known as Shipyard Point and later Governor's Point, after the Governor General of Canada, Lord Stanley of Preston, built a home there. Two of the largest boats ever built on the coast came from Cuthbert's shipyard: the *Saxon*, 787 tons, built in 1846 and the *Cuthbert*, 914 tons, built in 1848. Experienced ship carpenters and workers from Scotland provided the labour and at least 28 vessels were built in New Richmond between 1778 and 1870, the majority of them built in Cuthbert's yard before it ceased operations about 1854.

In Gaspé Bay, production of whale oil from whales captured in the Gulf of St. Lawrence contributed to the growth of shipbuilding in the area. The Gaspé Bay whalers used strongly-built schooners, from which they launched small boats equipped with oars used to pursue and harpoon whales. Whaling in this area reached its peak in the 1860s with petroleum products replacing whale oil. In 1858, there were five to ten whaling ships in Gaspé Bay; by the 1880s, only one whaling vessel remained.

At least forty people built vessels in Gaspé Bay between 1805 and 1890. Some of the most productive were the Annett family, William Miller (6 ships), Philip Bechervaise (5 ships), Thomas

English (6 ships) and Collas & Co. The earliest-registered ship at Gaspé Bay was launched by William Annett in 1805.

A Gaspé-built schooner was a "remarkably durable ship," according to John Macgregor, author of *The Progress of America* (1847). "One of those vessels which I saw moored in 1824, among the small fleet of Messrs. Robins in the bay De Chaleur, I went on board afterwards, in 1839, in the port of Messina, where the vessel, more than thirty years old, and perfectly sound, was discharging, in excellent condition, a cargo of dry codfish to feed the Sicilians."

However, the arrival of the railroad and the advent of steel ships in the mid-nineteenth century brought the era of shipbuilding in the Gaspé to a close. As detailed in Eileen Read Marcil's *The Charley-Man, A History of Wooden Shipbuilding at Quebec*, metal ships were stronger, they rarely leaked, their annual depreciation was less than wooden ships and insurance rates were far lower. According to McDougall, a regular government steamship service began, which brought freight, passengers and mail to the principal towns on the Gaspé coast, and the demand for large schooners, which had previously carried freight and passengers to and from Que-

bec City and Halifax, decreased. At about the same time the building of large square-rigged vessels also decreased because there was no longer a viable market for them in Great Britain.

By the end of the 1860s there were only two shipyards still building wooden sailing vessels. The Charles Robin Company at Paspébiac and the J. and E. Collas Company at Point St. Peter continued to build both schooners and square-rigged vessels for use in their business until the 1880s. The fisheries and lumber industry was affected by a world-wide depression in the late nineteenth century. After the Charles Robin Company went bankrupt in the mid-1880s, most of its fleet of sailing vessels was sold.

Today, few vestiges of the industry remain along the coast. At the *Banc-de-Pêche-de-Paspébiac* historic site visitors can watch traditional shipbuilding demonstrations and thematic exhibitions during the summer tourism season. In New Richmond, the Gaspesian British Heritage Village (Britville), the Bay Chaleur Military Museum and Stanley House stand on what was once Shipyard Point. Cuthbert's original lumber store still stands, but is now a private residence.

*Kim Harrison is past executive director of the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), based in New Carlisle.*



## SEA BIRDS

*Trade, travel and peril: Gaspé schooners in the age of sail*

by Kevin O'Donnell

The word Gaspé in the language of the Mi'kmaq Indians means "Land at the end of the earth." In the early days of settlement in many residents of the Gaspé Peninsula must have felt this was true. There were no roads between Gaspé and Quebec City. It took two or three weeks to make the journey on foot. Even along the coast, travel was difficult and slow. With boat and ships the sea and the river became highways linking Gaspé to Europe, the Caribbean, and the rest of North America. The river and sea provided Gaspésians with a livelihood as well.

Fishermen went out two or three kilometres from shore in small boats called *chaloupes* in French, pronounced "shallops" by English speakers. They fished with hand lines, each line having three or four hooks baited with pieces of herring. Gaspé cod fishermen either worked for, or sold their catch to large fish companies who sent schooners to the beaches to pick up their catch. Barrels of fish were loaded aboard the schooner for the trip to the fish company's warehouse. Eventually the fish was sold in Europe, the Caribbean, or South America.

Schooners were well-suited for what was called coastal trading. They were designed so they could sail in the shallow water near the shore. The schooner sails were rigged so that they could be adjusted from the deck. This meant that normally only a three-man crew was required to operate the vessel.

Square-rigged vessels were often larger than schooners and could carry more cargo. But they were not as manoeuvrable and needed a larger crew to work the sails. "Birds of the sea" one old sailor called them, referring to their

graceful movements. But if they were at home in sea and wind, schooners were products of the land and its people. And whenever a schooner sailed away, there was always the fear that it might never return.

Throughout the nineteenth century, beaches along the Gaspé coast echoed to the sounds of mallets, chisels, and saws—tools of the shipwright's trade. Often they had little formal training and worked without plan. But they knew how to build trim, seaworthy vessels. One of their most important tools was the steam-box, a long metal container

wrights had to take care not to line up the ends of the planks in a row, which would result in a weak spot in the vessel. Sea-going vessels twisted as they were battered by the waves. This resulted in leaks which could damage the cargo and endanger the schooner. The shipwrights had to make sure the frame of the boat was strong and flexible enough to stand up to the pounding of the waves.

To make the planking watertight Gaspesian shipwrights forced oakum, a mixture of tar and jute fibres, into the seams between the boards. When the schooner was ready for launching the shipwrights greased the blocks and knocked out the wedges holding the vessel to the scaffolding. A tug on the ropes and the hull began to move. With a resounding splash, the schooner slid into the water. When the two masts were put in place and the sails rigged, the schooner was ready to begin its career at sea.

One reason why Gaspé schooners made voyages was to hunt whales. The Right whale was valued for its oil and

whalebone. In the days before electricity, whale oil was used in lamps for homes and even for the huge lighthouse beacons which protected ships at sea. Whalebone, which came in long strips from the mouth of the whale, was used much like plastic is used today, to make umbrella frames for example.

One of the most famous of the Gaspé whaling ships was called the *Breeze*. Built in 1834, it survived forty years—a long life for a schooner. The *Breeze* usually carried a crew of fifteen men. As soon as a whale was spotted, two smaller whaleboats carrying six men each were immediately lowered to give chase. When they were close enough, the harpooner at the front of the boat



filled with "live" steam. After three or four hours in the steam-box, a straight plank would be pliable enough to bend into the graceful lines of the hull. The wood for Gaspé schooners came from the nearby forest. Oak, the preferred wood for building ships, was not available. Often shipwrights had to settle for spruce, which was plentiful but rotted after some years in salt water. Although larch trees were scarce, this wood was far more durable and was therefore used whenever possible.

Schooners were built around a skeleton of timbers. When the keel, ribs, and strengthening timbers were in place the vessel was said to be "in frame." Planking the vessel was an art. The ship-

stood up and hurled the iron shaft deep into the side of the whale. It was dangerous work. With one sweep of its powerful tail the animal could destroy a whale-boat.

After the whale was killed, the carcass was taken to shore or towed to the side of the schooner so the crewmen could remove the animal's blubber. It was from this blubber that whale oil was made. Chunks of blubber were boiled down to obtain the oil. The process was known as "trying" and the "tryworks" were often set up on the nearest beach. From a single whale, the whalers could obtain up to 10 barrels of oil, each worth about \$175.00—a lot of money in those days. In 1858, the *Breeze* brought in 210 barrels of oil, which were sold in Quebec City.

The *Breeze* never made the return trip from Quebec empty. Into the hold went more barrels, this time filled with sugar, peas, whiskey and other goods Gaspésians wanted from the big city. The schooner might even carry back a horse—perhaps a bit reluctant to undertake the week-long journey down the St. Lawrence River.

Coasting vessels such as schooners usually carried out relatively short voyages between towns and villages along the coast. Usually they travelled within sight of land. If a storm arose, the captain could hurry to the safety of a nearby cove and ride out the weather. But the little schooners made longer voyages as well, transporting fish to the Caribbean, Argentina, even to Europe. They had to endure anything the Atlantic threw at them. Rough seas were just one danger.

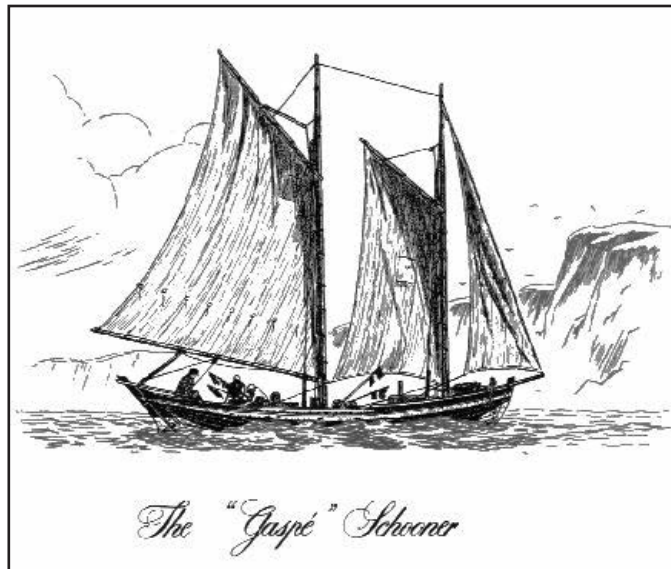
In 1817, the *Ann*, a schooner under the command of Captain Daniel Mabbe was attacked by pirates in the Caribbean Sea. Mabbe was killed.

A trip to Rio de Janeiro could take as long as six weeks. For all this time the cramped quarters of the little schooner was the sailors' home. The cook was an important member of the crew. A good meal of "sailor's wack," a stew made of cod, potatoes, onions, and salt pork, was one of the few pleasures the men could look forward to.

Gaspé mariners were often away for months at a time. In some villages almost all the men went to sea. Still, the life of the community had to go on. Women had to perform just about all the hard work, as well as care for the young, the sick and the aged. It was not an easy life, but life was not all hardship either.

In spite of the difficulties of travel, people would come long distances to take part in a wedding celebration. Because the menfolk were at sea during the summer, December, rather than June, was the traditional time for weddings in the Gaspé during the nineteenth century. Expert fiddlers like Alec McCrae provided the music, so everyone was sure to have a good time.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, changes were taking place that signalled the end of the age of sail. In 1859, steamships began chugging down the river from Quebec City to deliver



goods along the coast. By the 1870s, whale oil became obsolete for many purposes, replaced by petroleum oil from the ground. Ironically, Gaspé was one of the first oil-drilling sites in North America.

By 1873, the schooner *Breeze* was getting old. Her owner, Captain Harbour sold the rigging and gears, and ordered the hull broken up. By the 1890s Gaspésians had largely given up building schooners. The *Mizpah* was one of the last built. Her tragic story is still told on the Gaspé coast.

The *Mizpah* was launched on November 5, 1891. Her owners, the Buck-

ley brothers, must have felt they were lucky, because a local company immediately hired them to carry fish to Portugal. The *Mizpah* carried a crew of six—two Buckley brothers, as well as Elias Boyle, John Tuzo and a man named Taylor. Her master was Captain Tom Robson. Robson had a reputation for being a brave and capable mariner. Perhaps that's why the Bucleys and the fish company felt it was safe enough to attempt an Atlantic crossing in November, which was late in the season.

On Sunday December 6, 1891, the crew said goodbye to their loved ones, as the *Mizpah* prepared to set sail. Just a few weeks before, Captain Robson's wife had given birth to a daughter. Robson would never see his baby again. It was a cloudy day with a breeze blowing from the northwest. Even with 1,800 quintals of fish in her hold, the *Mizpah* needed only foresail and jib to carry her out of the harbour. She was the last vessel to leave port in 1891.

In the days before radio, there was no way for ships at sea to communicate to shore. The little 25-metre schooner battled the huge North Atlantic waves cut off from the outside world. Around the middle of December, a heavy snowstorm struck the Gaspé coast. The weather on the Atlantic must have been bad also. The first news of the *Mizpah* came in early January, 1892. A passing ship had sighted the schooner's wreckage a few weeks earlier. There was no sign of the crew.

But hope dies hard. Perhaps, just perhaps, Robson and his crew had somehow managed to survive. Perhaps even now they were in Portugal, Italy, even North Africa, trying to arrange their passage home to their loved ones. But as the weeks passed, hopes faded and then disappeared.

Six years later, a final entry was made in the Ships Register, the government record book: "The *Mizpah* foundered at sea in 1892. No tidings of vessel or crew heard of since."

*Kevin O'Donnell is the President of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network and is never, ever sick at sea.*



# DOCTOR COMMANDER

*Remembering William Wakeham, Canada's high-seas civil servant*

by Andrew D. Gilker

As part of the Gaspé's 475th anniversary celebrations, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in partnership with the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA) and the Community Economic Development and Employability Committee

(CEDEC), produced a historical audio guide highlighting the life and accomplishments of Commander

William Wakeham. He is perhaps best known for his expedition to Hudson's Bay and Cumberland Strait in 1897 upon which he declared Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic. His interactions with communities along the shores of the Gulf of St Lawrence distinguished Wakeham

as one of Gaspesia's most widely known and respected citizens of his time.

Wakeham first arrived in Gaspé in 1866 at the age of 21, after graduating from McGill University as a physician. It is not clear what brought the young Quebec City man to the Gaspé basin, but if adventure was his goal, his legacy proves that he most certainly achieved it.

For ten years, Wakeham travelled by horse or small boat to provide bilingual medical services to local residents. (Horseback was the most common mode of transportation in the area over short distances, as no roads or rails linked communities as they do today; for longer distances, or a more direct route, the sea was the highway of the era.)

Wakeham's sense of humour and his entertaining nature made him most popular with locals, whether they were in need of medical attention or not.

Although he had become an important fixture in the community, in 1876 he decided to return to Quebec City and be-

in the realm of law enforcement, his professional training and scientific mind lead him to have a more holistic view of the fishing industry. Wakeham took great interest not only in the economic aspect of the fisheries, but also of its social and environmental impact. He also

used his visitations to outposts as opportunities to provide medical care, making him a popular and well respected guest at each port of call.

Despite his many interests and vocations, Wakeham's primary task was still one of enforcement, an undertaking he took quite seriously. Many international ships would pass through the gulf and would be subject to Canadian laws. Masted schooners exporting fish for

companies such as Charles Robins Co. and Lebouillier Brothers were common. Smugglers and privateers were still prevalent, but could be intercepted by the Commander and his crew. As Wakeham was often the first point of contact for arriving or departing vessels, he was given additional federal enforcement powers. He was appointed Customs Inspector and Marine Police Commissioner, giving him unsurpassed authority over Canadian waters. Accounts of captured American smugglers or privateers were often published in the *New York Times*, which always referred to Commander William Wakeham by name. The tall, handsome and weather beaten man was making quite the name for himself –



came the head of medical staff at the Belmont Retreat. We can only assume that he longed for the community and lifestyle of the Gaspé, for in 1879 he applied for and was awarded the job of Inspector of Fisheries of the Gulf of St Lawrence, based once again in Gaspé.

As Inspector of Fisheries, Wakeham quickly became the best known Gaspesian in eastern Canada. He commanded a steam vessel and crew of armed men for law enforcement. His responsibilities included reporting on such issues as quantity and value of fish caught, the state of the rivers, fishing conditions, infractions of fishery laws and the actions taken in response to those violations. Although his official duties were primarily

feared by foes and welcomed by residents.

During the winter months when the ice set in and fishing ceased, Wakeham would once again call Gaspé home. After accepting the post of Fisheries Inspector, he purchased a residence named “One Ash” with a view of the south-west arm of Gaspé Bay. Over time he added rooms to the house to suit his interests, including a medical office, billiards room, sports room, music room and greenhouse. The music and billiards rooms became gathering places for many locals. Wakeham’s reputation as a gracious host can be attested to by the numerous social gatherings held at his estate. The sports room displayed trophies from his personal hunting and angling adventures. A greenhouse fed his personal passion for horticulture, allowing him to grow exotic plants such as oranges. One can well imagine that the name of a man that grows oranges in Gaspé could not go unknown.

His methodical and scientific mind made Wakeham uniquely acquainted with all aspects of the fishery. For this reason, in 1893, he was appointed as the Canadian representative to the joint commission to examine Canadian-American boundary waters and fishing grounds, which led to the Boundary Waters Treaty. This treaty essentially established Canada’s international maritime borders. In this role, Wakeham also conducted a number of joint studies on fishing techniques, pollution prevention and resource conservation.

**A**lthough the Commander had already served a most distinguished career by 1897, he is perhaps best known for his voyage to the Arctic. With the advent of the Klondike Gold Rush and the resulting influx of Americans into Western Canada, the ill defined borders made it difficult to enforce Canadian laws and sovereignty. Similarly, on Canada’s east coast, foreign fishermen frequented the gulf and Arctic regions. Under Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier a number of voyages were commissioned to explore the Arctic with the intention of providing a federal presence and securing the sovereignty of the Arctic territory for Canada. Commander Wakeham was commissioned in April 1897 for just such a mission.

Voyages to the Arctic were not unheard of at the time. European and American fishermen had been visiting these areas regularly for decades and had established whaling stations in the territory. The Commander’s purpose was to determine when shipping channels were ice-free, evaluate fishing potential and to enforce Canadian sovereignty in the area. Administratively, all remaining British territories in North America were proclaimed Canadian sovereign territory in 1880. Wakeham’s mission was to be the first concrete action to assert Canada’s sovereignty over the Arctic archipelago.

Wakeham selected a fast and manoeuvrable steam ship named *Diana* for the mission. Although the ship was nearly thirty years old, it was ideally suited for the ice-packed Arctic waters. A crew of experienced officers, whalers and fishermen were hired along with a scientific team to study the animals and minerals of the territory. Once assembled in the port of Halifax, the ship carried 43 people with supplies for seventeen weeks.

Leaving port in June of 1897, S.S. *Diana* headed for the Hudson Strait, a three week voyage up the Labrador coast. The crew was greeted by heavy ice which seized the ship for ten days; the vessel narrowly survived. When the ice retreated and the ship was freed, Wakeham continued into Hudson’s Bay where he studied the ice flows, travelling the length of the strait twice before reaching the island of Kekerten.

Kekerten Island is roughly 50 kilometres south of what is now Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, Nunavut, in the Cumberland Sound. Wakeham was startled to find a Scottish whaling station which had been in operation for 35 years. The manager responsible for the station was apparently unaware of what country held title to the land. Commander Wakeham decided that the first official claim to the Arctic would be on this island. On August 17th in the presence of over 150 Inuit whalers, the manager of the whaling station and the crew of the *Diana*, Wakeham hoisted the Union Jack as a symbol of Canada’s presence. As he did this he proclaimed:

I hereby declare in the presence of all now assembled that I hoist the Union Jack as the open and notori-

ous conduct that all this territory of Baffin’s Land—with all adjacent territories and islands—is now as it has been since the time of the first discovery and occupation under the exclusive Sovereignty of Great Britain. God save the Queen.

**T**his statement confirmed Canada’s jurisdiction and political authority over 500,000 square miles of territory. A photograph was taken to capture the moment. Little national attention was paid to the accomplishment at the time, in large part due to the madness of the gold rush in western Canada. To reinforce the country’s claims, a handful of additional voyages were commissioned between 1903 and 1911, including those of the Captain J.E. Bernier. In 1903, the famed Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen led the first expedition that successfully traversed Canada’s Northwest Passage, linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

There has been renewed focus on the Arctic in recent years due to melting ice of the Northwest Passage. As in 1897, increased international shipping activity has raised concerns over Canada’s ability to enforce her sovereign authority. A federal presence in the Arctic with the ability to intercept foreign vessels and enforce Canadian law is as vitally important today as it was in Wakeham’s time.

Wakeham’s name can be found on maps of regions where he lived and worked.

The community on the north shore of the southwest Arm of Gaspé Bay bears his name, as does Wakeham Bay in northern Quebec. His residence, “One Ash,” still stands overlooking the bay today as The Wakeham Inn. Two streets in the town of Gaspé were also named in his memory. Although it has been well over one hundred and fifty years since Dr Wakeham began his career, his adventures and accomplishments ought to be points of pride not only for Gaspésians and Quebecers, but for all Canadians.

*Download the audio guide to Wakeham’s life and times in English or French at the Musée de la Gaspésie website: [www.museedelagaspesie.ca](http://www.museedelagaspesie.ca).*

# KNOTS IN THE NETWORK

*Local history and culture rate below scenery in Gaspé's regional planning*

by Pierre Rastoul



The Gaspé peninsula holds quite a challenge for visitors: miles upon miles of scenic landscape, bays and riverheads, nooks and crannies, villages and communities, languages and customs, architectural styles and artifacts—all linked to one another like beads in a rosary. And long distances separate the major tourist attractions, at least the ones that official visitor guides point to as quintessential Gaspé fare: Percé, Forillon, Miguasha, and Parc de la Gaspésie. And yet none of these sites by themselves is sufficient to define Gaspé's wealth of nature, history and culture.

Much could be said of government-led efforts to safeguard Gaspé scenery, and how so many historic communities have been obliterated in the process: preserving the landscape didn't prevent roads from destroying green spaces and local architecture in the heart of countless Gaspesian villages. The iconoclastic attitude lingers, with tourism officials insisting that rocks, birds, trees and outdoor activities are the only visitor attractions of any real value, Gaspé's "produit d'appel" in marketing lingo.

Fortunately, many heritage buildings and other cultural landmarks have survived the bulldozers and nature enthusiasts; some magnificent scenery and choice sites have been preserved or restored for posterity. Indeed, the Gaspé retains a wealth of natural and cultural attractions for which huge efforts have been invested to protect, safeguard and promote. When it

comes to cultural heritage, however, government support has lagged far behind the commitment of individuals, organizations and communities. Were it not for volunteer efforts, much of Gaspé's heritage would today be lost.

A select few museums, historic sites and natural parks operate today with funding from provincial or federal government museum-support programs and other public agencies. The larger parks and interpretation centres—Restigouche, Miguasha, Pabos, Percé, Forillon, Parc de la Gaspésie—are funded and managed directly through agencies such as Parks Canada or Parcs Québec. A few regional museums, the Musée de la Gaspésie (Gaspé) and the Quebec Acadian Museum (Bonaventure), as well as major historical sites such as Paspébiac or Fame Point (Pointe-à-la-Renommée), along with other smaller interpretation centres like Newport or Rivière-au-Renard, benefit from varying amounts of public funding, some municipal. Yet, a large group of local organizations and sites get by with very little help, if any.

All in all, there are almost fifty heritage, nature or museum sites and organizations around the Gaspé, and that number is steadily growing through the local efforts of individuals and communities. Interpretation centres, preserved historical buildings and other cultural attractions valued by local populations dot the countryside, competing for exposure, funding, income, visitors and, to put things plainly, mere survival. Signifi-



cantly, many of these struggling heritage groups are closely associated with historic English-speaking communities: Kempt Road, New Richmond, Cascapedia, New Carlisle, Port-Daniel, Barachois and others. Although recognized museums and sites have recently seen investments in networking through the Conseil de la Culture de la Gaspésie, many of the anglophone pieces in the Gaspesian heritage jigsaw puzzle have long been ignored, possibly because of past political and linguistic confrontations that kept English-speaking communities out of the mainstream of Gaspé cultural and tourist development.

In any case, even “mainstream” efforts at heritage networking in the Gaspé have been limited. Challenges of distance, language barriers, and public policies ill-suited to harmonizing culture and nature have all helped to undermine cooperation among heritage sites and organizations in the region. This in turn has prevented members of Gaspé’s broader heritage community, Mi’kmaq, French and English alike, from sharing resources and seeking common cause in the development of a coherent promotional strategy.

Set against a backdrop of timeless scenery where the sea, the mountains and fossil traces dwarf human presence to minute proportions, one is easily tempted to dismiss history and culture as alien. That natural sites are seen as the main appeal for tourists comes as no surprise in view of their visual allure and recreational potential. However, over the last few decades, nature has been steadily played against culture—against human presence and the historical record. This marketing argument drives heritage issues into the margins, minimizing historical interpretation and preservation as a focus for investment. In fact, history, culture and heritage are a lot more significant.

The record of human occupation and historical presence in the Gaspé is a story of people living in nature, drawing on the resources of the environment to survive, and finding original ways to blend this presence into their surroundings. And yet, the marketing argument for nature’s “produit d’appel” has been long opposed to cultural heritage, as if a choice had to be made between the two. This attitude has isolated many Gaspesian communities and their heritage from the benefits of tourism-based economic development.

History and culture, set within a framework of landscape and nature, living memory against the antiquity of ages, have long been seen as contradictions rather than complementary issues. In so doing, these parallel views have been kept apart as separate areas of effort, isolating cultural from natural heritage. This hinders efforts to promote community attractions as an integrated whole.

While Nature was played against Culture as opposing themes in Gaspé tourism, local communities, villages, and ethno-cultural groups came to feel like competitors struggling for their share of visitors, funding and public exposure. Though commercial hospitality providers may very well compete for customers, the

idea that natural or cultural heritage attractions do so is absurd, since it is in everyone’s interest to offer many things to see and do; this adds to the region’s appeal and contributes to a deeper appreciation of the Gaspé as a whole, by residents and visitors alike.

In the Gaspé, Native heritage, British and Jersey heritage, French and Acadian heritage, all blend into a rich variety of cultural scenes, which translate into diversified architectural landscapes, ways of living off the land, languages and accents: quite an attractive menu for visiting tourists. However, these differences have in the past also played into a sense of mutual competition that visitors may feel as conflicts.

Tensions between communities, Native, French or English, neighbouring villages or distant areas, have built up and receded over the years, stemming from historical situations and conflicts which are now rather remote in regional history. At times, cultural tensions have brought sectarian attitudes, rather than cross-cultural dialogues. These tensions survive in attitudes that can still drive communities apart instead of bringing people together in a network of joint effort, shared resources and common goals. Plus, a long tradition of seeing outsiders and newcomers as intruders (Natives versus Europeans, Acadians versus Loyalists, for example), or of seeing historic culture-based conflicts (Jersey companies versus local fishermen), still has the power to fuel animosity.

Promoting anglophone heritage sites in the Gaspé holds an additional difficulty, in that English-speaking communities have a recent history of being kept out of the heritage mainstream, when they aren’t shutting themselves out of their own free will. The challenge for closely-knit anglophone communities in the Gaspé is to connect with the region’s existing networks, rooted in French-speaking communities, while at the same time retaining their distinctive presence and identity.

Since specific heritage areas, often culturally distinct or very distant from each other, are intimately linked by a unique coastal route, Gaspé communities also have to live with the fact that connecting attractions and communities into a working network will be a difficult undertaking. Here, patterns of living inevitably clash with patterns in travel, as visitors from the outside (or for that matter, from within the Gaspé) appear as moving targets for any organization hoping to lure visitors. In the Gaspé, heritage attractions must vie for attention in a far-flung geography: catching visitors on the move is another challenge. Working together in an efficient network would now appear as a fundamental condition for success.

*Pierre Rastoul spent 20 years working with the Musée de la Gaspésie in Gaspé and in 2007 co-authored a comprehensive inventory of heritage resources in the Gaspé region for the Conseil de la Culture de la Gaspésie. He is currently curator of the Colby-Curtis Museum in Stanstead, in the Eastern Townships.*

# EVENTS LISTINGS

## Eastern Townships

Uplands Cultural & Heritage Centre  
9 Speid St.(Lennoxville)  
Info: 819-564-0409  
7 February to 7 March  
Exhibition - Susan Monty & Alex De Lavoie

11 to 21 March  
Exhibition - Quebec Week for Intellectual Handicap

14 March  
St-Patrick's Tea -With Live music! To Reserve (819)564-0409  
Brome County Historical Society  
Info:450243-6782, b  
chs@endirect.qc.ca  
Email: bchs@endirect.qc.ca

### HISTORICAL REPRINTS NOW AVAILABLE

The History of Brome County Volumes 1 & 2 by Rev. E.M. Taylor have been reprinted. They are available individually or as a set. The set sells for \$99.95, individually \$53.95

ST. PATRICK'S SOCIETY OF RICHMOND AND VICINITY  
Info: Dennis Ridley at 819-826-5231  
OR Mark O'Donnell at 819-826-2535

March 21, 2010  
ST. PATRICKS 2010 PARADE  
Each year in March, the St. Patrick's Society celebrates St. Patrick's activities throughout the month of March including an annual banquet and dance, and the St. Patrick's parade.  
WHERE; Starts at 7th Ave., Richmond, Quebec

## Montreal

Quebec Family History Society  
Info: 514-695-1502  
Website: www.qfhs.ca

March 13th, 10:30 a.m  
Lecture: Paths of Opportunity"  
Sharon Callaghan will talk about her

book Paths of Opportunity, which evolved from a desire to discover more about the Irish Montreal experience of her great-great-grandparents.  
WHERE: St Andrew's United Church, Lachine

March 16th, 7 pm  
TALK ON THE IRISH IN QUEBEC (POINTE CLAIRE)  
Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell, curator of the Being Irish Exhibit O'Quebec at the McCord Museum of Canadian History will give a talk on the integration of Irish immigrants and their contribution to the social, cultural, political and economic fabric of Quebec from the era of New France to today.

WHERE: Pointe Claire Public Library, Central Branch, 100 Douglas-Shand Avenue, Pointe-Claire (Québec)

Info: Contact the Library at 514-630-1218 or visit [http://www.ville.pointe-claire.qc.ca/en\\_1046\\_index.php](http://www.ville.pointe-claire.qc.ca/en_1046_index.php)

Westmount Historical Association  
Westmount Public Library, 4574 Sherbrooke St. West  
Info: 514-925-1404 or 514-932-6688  
Email:info@westmounthistorical.org

LECTURE SERIES  
March 18, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
WESTMOUNT STATION AND THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY  
SPEAKER: Justin Bur, M.Urb. (urban planning)

Exporail, Canadian Railway Museum  
110, rue Saint-Pierre, Saint-Constant  
General Information: 450-632-2410

Atwater Library and Computer Centre  
1200 Atwater at Ste-Catherine (métro Atwater)  
Info: Contact lverge@atwaterlibrary.ca or visit [www.atwaterlibrary.ca](http://www.atwaterlibrary.ca)

March 17 at 12:30 pm  
LUNCHTIME SERIES: IRISH MUSIC BY CRAIC-ATAC

For the Atwater Library Lunchtime Series, on St. Patrick's Day the group CRAIC-ATAC performs traditional Irish music with joie de vivre. Band members are Claude Bertrand on guitar and bouzouki; Janet Laskey on fiddle, small harp and low whistle; Jocelyne Pate-naude on button accordion and hurdy gurdy; and singer Donna-Marie Sullivan Marosi, who also plays the bodhrán (celtic drum). Everyone is welcome and coffee and biscuits are served. Free admission; donations invited

## Outaouais

Gatineau Valley Historical Society  
80 ch Summer, Cantley  
Info: 819-459-2004  
Email: info@gvhs.ca

March 15, 7:30 p.m.  
LECTURE  
Barry Wilson will reveal the strong connection he discovered between the vast majority of prime ministers and the Gatineau Valley

## Quebec City

Morrin Center  
44, Chaussée des Écossais Quebec  
Info: 418-694-9147 or 0754  
Email: info@morrin.org  
Website: www.morrin.org

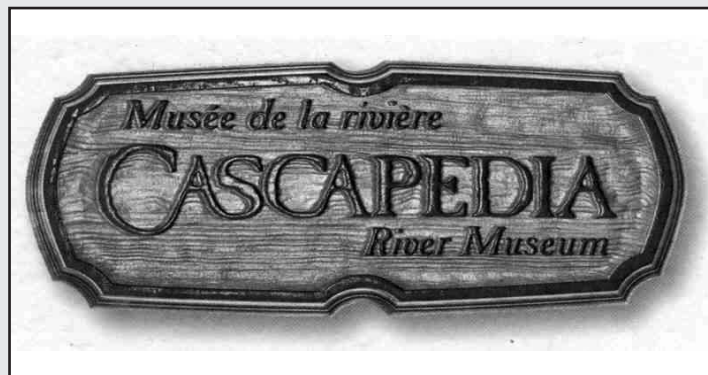
March 14, 2 p.m.  
CELEBRATION ST-PATRICK'S DAY  
LE VIOLON VERT

Back for the first time since the 2009 Quebec City Celtic Festival, the talented dancers from the Le Violon Vert are ready to share their passion once more. After the show, the audience will be invited to take part in a dance workshop. Come learn new steps and join in the fun, as we celebrate St. Patrick's Day!

Free 12 years and under-13-16 years old  
\$8. – adults \$10.

## This Summer

Immerse yourself  
in the history & heritage  
of a great Gaspé  
salmon river



Destination of the rich and famous for more than 150 years

Featuring a unique collection of sportfishing memorabilia

Come learn the fascinating story of this fabled Gaspé river!

Permanent Exhibition - Guided Tours -  
Lady Amherst Tea Room -  
Documentation Centre - Atlantic  
Salmon Interpretation Centre &  
Aquarium - Gift shop

### Guest Exhibit for 2010:

“Three Rivers – One Artist’s View”  
By Peter Corbin

### Hours & Admission

Museum operates from June 1 to September 30  
Open from 8 a.m to 4 p.m.

Admission: \$5.00 per person with free admission for children under 12 years old  
275, route 299, Cascapédia-St-Jules, Quebec