

"GASPE OF YESTERDAY"

ANNE  
KEN ANNETT

VOL. I

GASPE OF YESTERDAY

VOLUME I

FOREWORD

In introduction to "THE BOOK OF EBENEZER LE PAGE", G.B. Edward's unusual and interesting story of the Island of Guernsey, John Fowles has given a penetrating and pertinent comment on the gap that exists between our modern age of the 20th century and the past. He stated, in part:

"We are still too close to it to realize what an astounding and unprecedented change, unprecedented both in its extent and its speed, has taken place in the psyche of Western mankind... In very many ways... the 19th century remained closer to the 17th than our own... It is almost as if... we left the old planet and found a new and we are all...still victims of that profound shock.

We have at least realized we made a very clumsy landing on our new planet, and also left a number of things behind on the old that we might have done better to bring with us... qualities of fierce independence, toughness of spirit, patience and courage, the ability to cope and make do..."

This first volume of GASPE OF YESTERDAY brings together a number of issues of a series submitted for publication in the Gaspesian newspaper, SPEC. These issues reflect my deep desire to recapture and record some aspects of the Gaspesian heritage. The sweep of time involved is so vast as to pose great challenge for such a project. No less

than 450 years have passed since Jacques Cartier raised the Cross at Gaspé and 200 years have gone by since the distressed Loyalists came to settle on Gaspesian shores. The citizen of today in the District of Gaspé with access to the modern marvels of technology lives truly, on a "new planet" in comparison with that "old planet" that his ancestors claimed, settled and developed. Yet, despite the long span of time, there has never been a period when the qualities referred to in the above quotation from John Fowles were more pertinent and needed.

In such measure that an awareness and appreciation of the personalities and events of the past influence the future, it is hoped that this volume of GASPE OF YESTERDAY will make a contribution to an understanding of the Gaspesian heritage.

Allowing for a normal degree of sentiment and nostalgia, it is nonetheless undeniable that Gaspesia exercises a unique and pervasive influence on its native sons and daughters. Though many of them live far from Gaspesia in other parts of Canada, the United States and beyond, the mystique of the land of their birth tugs at their hearts and minds. This heritage is a blend of the unique environmental factors that characterize Gaspesia. For the District of Gaspé is distinct and different among the regions of Quebec. Washed by the wide waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Bay Chaleur, bordered by a magnificent coast-line of infinite variety, traversed by lovely rivers and backed by the highest and most rugged mountains east of the Rockies, the peninsula of Gaspé is justly famed for its natural beauty and the variety of its scenery. Wherever they may wander Gaspesians retain a link with this scenic, sea-washed homeland.

Located at the seaward entrance to the mighty St. Lawrence, Gaspesia was the landfall for the earliest European seaman that came to Canada. Its shores may well have witnessed the snipe of the Vikings from Iceland and Greenland circa 1000 A.D. Hardy Basque whalers and fishermen were on its coasts, in season, for decades prior to the landing of Jacques Cartier at Gaspé in 1534. Breton and Norman fishermen and traders knew Percé



with its distinctive pierced rock as a welcome landfall after their perilous Atlantic crossing and it was from the shores of Gaspesia that they exploited the rich fishery of the Gulf and Bay Chaleur. The Governors of New France were aware of the economic and strategic importance of Gaspé even though they neglected the region so distant from Quebec. Its lands were granted in fief and seigniorship and its fine harbours served as ports-of-call for shipping inbound from and outbound to France. In the course of time the roar of naval guns would echo from Gaspesian shores as first the Huguenot seamen and later the British Royal Navy battled the French for control of the St. Lawrence and Quebec. In 1758 Gaspé Bay served as the naval and military base from which the forces of General James Wolfe reduced the French settlements in Bay Chaleur and the Gulf prior to the conquest of New France in 1759-60.

The settlement of the shores of Gaspesia was gradual and varied. The native people, the Micmac Indians, had contact on a seasonal basis with Basque and French fishermen. The dispossessed Acadians found refuge and new homes on its shores. They were joined, later, by the equally dispossessed Loyalists fleeing the excesses of the American Revolution. Merchants, seamen and fishermen of the Channel Islands - Jersey and Guernsey - came to exploit the rich fisheries and contributed to permanent settlement. Some of the fishermen from the older St. Lawrence parishes remained to settle. Prince Edward Island and the Miramichi region of New Brunswick contributed settlers of English and Scotch ancestry. Settlement of Irish immigrants added to the microcosm of early Gaspesian society.

Our Gaspesian ancestors faced stern challenges that called forth great human resources of courage, resourcefulness, and toleration. These remain as the greatest heritage of their descendents. Long isolated from centers of population, trade, and government - with the only practical link of travel and communication the sea - Gaspesian settlements grew slowly but with remarkable self-sufficiency. While the men toiled at shipbuilding, fishing, whaling, lumbering and trade, the women

matched their men in their courage and devotion as homemakers.

Over the years the lure of Gaspesia has inspired artists, writers and poets. Each has sought to express, in his or her own way, the appeal of this rugged and fascinating land. The following extract of an unknown poet will serve well to conclude this foreword:

"LAND OF THE NORTH, WHOSE DISTANT BORDERS LIE  
BETWEEN THE MIGHTY RIVER AND THE SEA -  
A REALM OF VAST DOMAIN WITHIN ITSELF,  
AND WORTH THE RANSOM OF A CROSEUS KING :

OH, THE MAJESTY OF THE MOUNTAINS,

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA,

THE LURE OF RESTLESS RIVERS

SWEEPING ON UNCEASINGLY :

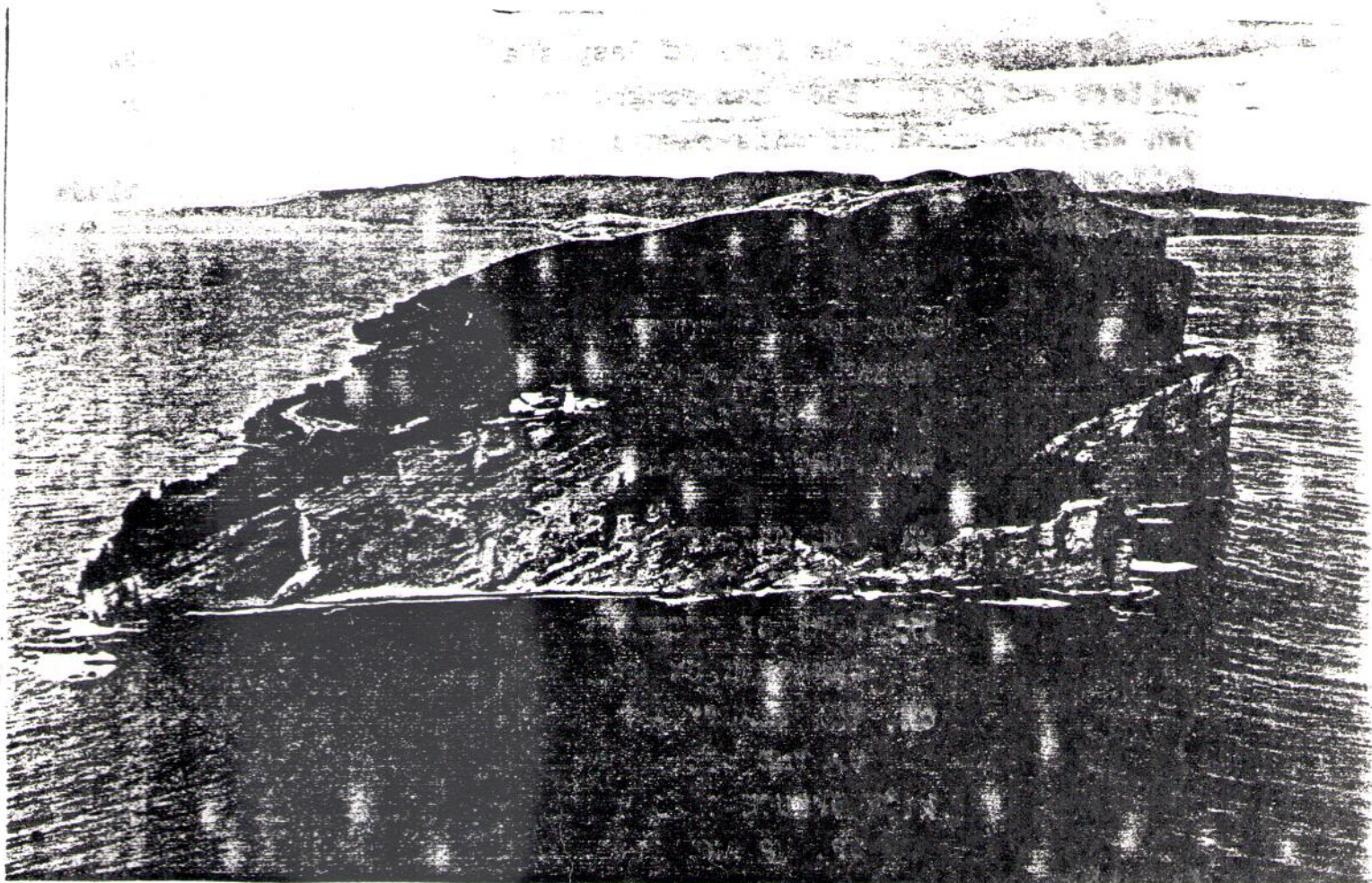
OH, THE BEAUTY AND THE GRANDEUR

OF THE WIDE EXPANSE OF BAY,

WITH SPRUCE-CLAD HILLS ON EITHER SIDE

UP, UP AND FAR AWAY :





CAPE GASPÉ

WHERE THE MOUNTAINS MEET THE OPEN SEA