

THE ARRIVAL OF JACQUES CARTIER IN GASPE IN 1534

FOREWORD

Though the name of Frederick James Richmond continues to be recalled annually to the youth of Gaspé through the award of the Richmond scholarships, established by his brother, George, the life and influence of this remarkable Gaspesian has faded with time and the passing away of those who knew him personally. Sweeping social changes have so altered the society of his native town of Gaspé that much of its earlier English heritage may soon be forgotten.

As one of the sons of the Rev. John Pettener Richmond, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Gaspé from 1867, Fred. Richmond grew up with a deep love of the land and people of Gaspé Basin and its neighbouring communities about Gaspé Bay. He was widely known for his keen, inquiring mind, his interest and aptitude in legal matters, his un-failing optimism in the future development of Gaspé's resources, and his readiness to engage all and sundry in stimulating conversation. He was much sought out for his great fund of knowledge of Gaspesia by prominent visitors such as the distinguished geologist and author, Dr. John Clarke, the Federal and Provincial geologists who came to seek and assess mineral resources, master mariners, fishermen, lumbermen, and others.

The history of Gaspé was a deep and abiding interest of Fred. Richmond. In common with another distinguished citizen of Gaspé, Commander William Wakeham, he acquired a vast fund of historical information. Unfortunately, much of it was lost with his death.

Of his writings that has survived, his commentary on "THE LANDING OF JACQUES CARTIER AT GASPE IN 1534", which he presented before the Canadian Historical Society, is recalled by GASPE OF YESTERDAY in testimony of the ability of this distinguished son of Gaspé.

THE LANDING PLACE OF JACQUES CARTIER AT GASPE - 1534

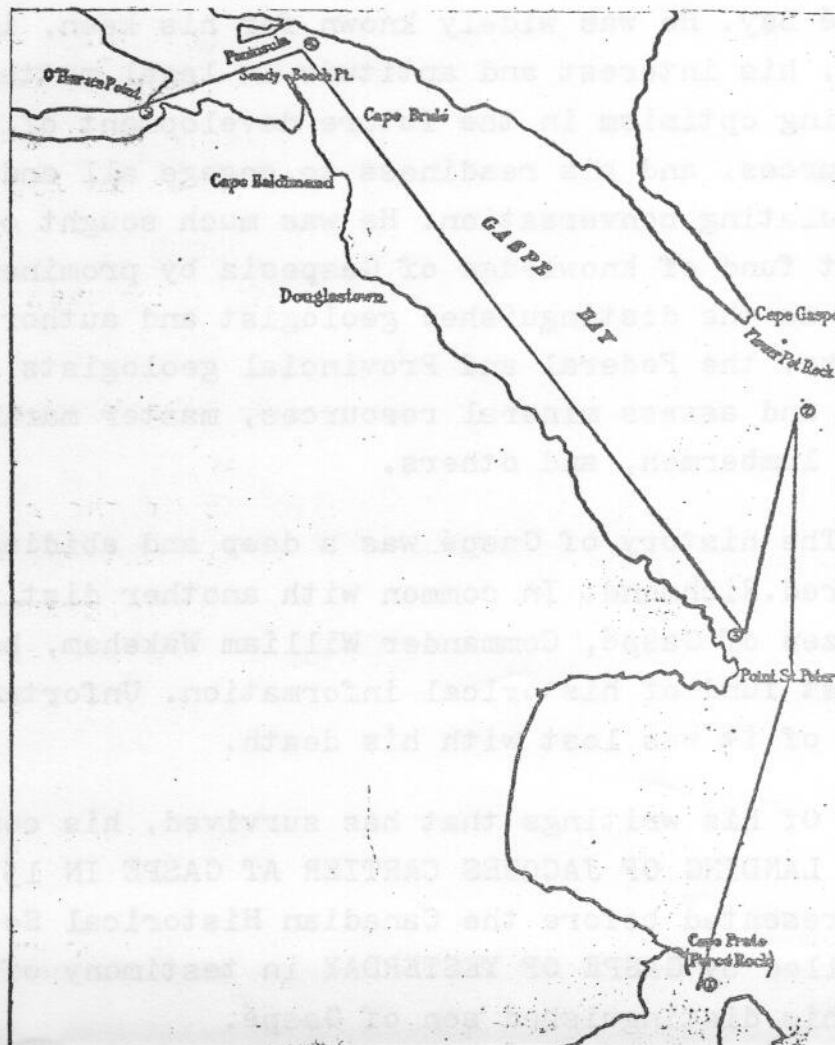
F.J.RICHMOND

1922

According to his Journal (Hakluyt), Cartier anchored between Cape Prato (Percé Rock) and an island (Bonaventure Island), on July 12,1534.

He sailed thence on July 13,1534, and followed the coast which he described, "Lyeth Northeast"; we next read, "there arose such stormie and raging winds against vs that we were constrained to come to the place againe from whence we were come"; or in other words, owing to unfavourable weather conditions, he was obliged to return to anchorage between Percé Rock and Bonaventure Island.*

(* The author is indebted for assistance to Dr.John M.Clarke, of Albany, N.Y., and to Captain Russel Coffin of Gaspé, who, in addition to general assistance, traced upon the chart the probable course of Cartier from Bonaventure Island to Gaspé Basin.)



The Journal or Log entry for July 14, 15 and 16 reads as follows: "We hoisted vp saile and we came to the midst of a river (Gaspé Bay) Northward five or six leagues from Cape of Prato (Percé Rock), and being ouerthwart (abreast) there arose againe a contrary wind with great fogges and stormes so that we were constrained vpon Tuesday being the fourteenth of the month to enter into the river; and there did we stay till the sixteenth of the month looking for faire weather to come out of it; on which day being Thursday, the wind became so ragging that one of our ships lost an anker; we were constrained to goe vp higher into the river seven or eight leagues into a good harborough and ground (anchorage) that we with our boats found out."

Before discussing Cartier's probable course up Gaspé Bay and landing places, I would like to call attention to the well known fact that he was very inaccurate in the determination of latitude and longitude; not always correct in estimating distances run or courses followed; yet he always mentioned some distinctive feature by which places described can easily be recognized by the present day readers. It is also essential, when considering Cartier's voyages, to remember that the league in use in 1534 was equal to two and one-half nautical miles only.

Cartier's Journal of his voyage from Bonaventure Island to Gaspé, recapitulated, would show:-

1. That at a certain distance from Percé Rock, Northward, he came to the middle of a river - (Gaspé Bay)
2. That when lying overthwart or abreast of the river or bay he met a contrary wind and stormy weather and was obliged to enter the bay for shelter; that as the storm progressed he was driven from anchorage, and sought refuge in a good harbour and ground (anchorage) which he used boats to find out -(evidently Gaspé Basin)

In order to reasonably determine the exact point of landing, it is necessary to consider:-

1. The position of Cartier's ships when the contrary wind was encountered;

3.

2. The direction of the wind and storm, which, without doubt, exercised great influence upon his choice of anchorage and subsequent course;
3. The approximate course and distance run from anchorage to Gaspé Basin.

Accepting the minimum run stated in log, namely five leagues or twelve and a half miles Northward from Percé Rock, Cartier's ships should have been fairly early in the day of July 14, 1534, about in the position designated upon the chart by the figure 2.

Cartier apparently did not have any intention of examining Gaspé Bay, but rather of continuing his voyage along the coast. He could have done so with wind from the West, Southwest, South, Southeast, East, but not with head winds from the North, Northwest, and Northeast. A contrary or head wind I would define as one coming from a direction opposite to that which had propelled a vessel to a given point; or as one coming from a direction opposite to that which it is the desire of the navigator to follow.

Local mariners * (* Captains George T. Annett, Clement Roberts and Edwin Miller, of Gaspé, First Officer Hubert Coffin, also of Gaspé, and many mariners and fishermen) after careful consideration of the question, are of the opinion that the storm encountered by Cartier must have come from the Northeast. The writer, besides, has found out from weather diaries kept by him for a number of years, that during the month of July in nearly every year there occur from one to two storms from a Northeast direction (cf. appended weather diary extracts for years 1903 to 1910 incl.) The storm met by Cartier was not unlike those that occurred in the months of July, 1907 and 1910.

A 'Northeaster' begins, generally speaking, with cloudy weather and light wind. About the second or third day, the wind, which has been increasing in force and accompanied by fog and rain, veers as the storm progresses to the East, then Southeast, often going around to the Southwest in the clearing stage. The lower Bay of Gaspé anchorages in the first stage of a storm are none too good, but when the wind veers to East and the sea enters the Bay, it is impossible for ships to ride at anchor. (For description of sea

conditions in the lower Bay of Gaspé during storms, see THE ST. LAWRENCE PILOT, 1894, VOL I, PAGE 79)

The next important question is whether Cartier anchored upon the Northern or Southern shores of Gaspé Bay. Two courses were open to him when he encountered the contrary or head wind: Firstly, he could have worked to windward and run in under the high land of the North shore of Gaspé Bay, slightly above Cape Gaspé, where he would have found reasonable shelter until that stage of the storm when the sea entering the bay would have driven him out. This shore has high cliffs and an unfavourable look, and would not appeal to a mariner seeking shelter upon an unknown coast. Secondly, he could have stood in to the South shore, which, regarded from the sea, has a more favourable appearance, and anchored slightly inside of Point St. Peter, the point of the Southern entrance to the lower Bay of Gaspé, where he would have been reasonably safe until the stage of the storm when the sea would enter the Bay and drive him out - (which did occur.)

It would appear that Cartier did not anchor on the North shore of Gaspé Bay for the following reasons:

The minimum distance from anchorage to "Harborough" is stated at seven leagues (17 1/2 miles); the maximum distance at eight leagues (20 miles). The distance from Cape Gaspé to Gaspé Basin is given by THE ST. LAWRENCE PILOT - an Admiralty navigating hand-book - as follows:-

Flower Pot Rock (cape Gaspé) to lighthouse at extreme Northern end of Sandy Beach.....	11 miles
Sandy Beach Bar lighthouse to anchorage Gaspé Basin.....	3 1/2 "

14 1/8 "

(an overrun of minimum log distance of 3 miles; an overrun of maximum log distance of 5 1/8 miles)

Dealing with the anchorage question in so far as the South shore of the bay is in question, distances, according to THE ST. LAWRENCE PILOT, are as follows:

Point St.Peter to Douglastown.....12 miles.

Douglastown to Cape Haldimand..... 2 "

Cape Haldimand to Northern end Sandy Beach Bar... 3 "

Sandy Beach Bar lighthouse to anchorage on
Western side of O'Hara's Point, Gaspé Basin (est.) 3 1/2

20 1/2 miles

Deduct distance of supposed anchorage
inside of Point st.Peter..... 1/2 "

20 miles

This practically agrees with the maximum run of eight leagues, or twenty miles, from anchorage to "Harborough". Master mariners and mariners consulted have, therefore, concluded that the first anchorage of Cartier in the lower Bay of Gaspé was on the Southern side, in the neighbourhood of Point St.Peter, a position indicated upon the chart by 3. Their opinion is that, the wind probably being on shore, he anchored in about twelve fathoms of water, so as to be able, if necessary, to work off shore easily. They also believe that his trip from Bonaventure Island towards Gaspé Basin proceeded about as follows:-

July 14, 1534 - He sailed from anchorage between Bonaventure Island and Percé (chart I); wind probably from the South; course, until opening Gaspé Bay, N.N.E., thence N. true.

A distance run of five leagues or twelve and a half miles would bring him about to the position designated upon the chart by the figure 2. Thence, upon meeting the Northeast wind, it is presumed that he stood in to the South shore and anchored in about twelve fathoms of water at about the position indicated by 3.

July 15, 1534 - The fleet evidently rode at anchor, but, the next day when the wind veered and the sea entered the bay, rendering anchorage untenable, they ran up Gaspé Bay, probably on a course N. by W. for a distance of fifteen and a half miles, which would carry the vessels to the extreme Northern end of Sandy Beach Bar (chart 4). At this position they would open the Narrows leading into Gaspé Basin, and O'Hara's Point could be seen extending out into it. So it is reasonable to suppose that at the position indicated by 4 on the chart, the course was changed to W. to half

N.Mag., which would carry the vessels into Gaspé Basin to anchorage on the Western side of O'Hara's Point (chart 5) about three and a half miles distant from position 4.

The distance measured along a regular ship's course is 19 miles, whereas per shore or coastal line it is 20 miles, which agrees with the distance covered by Cartier (20 miles) and shows that he did not take a direct course, but followed the trend of the shore. This accounts for the difference of one mile.

The master mariners and seamen consulted, all of whom are experienced in matters relating to the navigation of the Gulf and coast, were of opinion that the mention of the use of boats to examine the harbour indicates that before bringing his ships through the Narrows, he used boats to examine the channel. After examining the Journal of Voyage and weighing all possible points which might have exerted influence upon Cartier's choice of a landing place, they were agreed that on July 22, 1534, Cartier must have landed upon O'Hara's Point in Gaspé Basin.

APPENDIX

Conclusions arrived at by mariners as to the landing place of Cartier -

1. Cap-aux-Os (charted as Cape Brulé), Sandy Beach and Peninsula, formerly considered as possible landing places, are too far down the Bay of Gaspé and were without doubt passed by Cartier. The use of boats to seek harbour and anchorage denotes narrow waters. The three above-mentioned places are situated where the bay is some miles in width, with deep water close in to shore. Anchorage consequently could have been found without boats, the use of the lead being sufficient.

These places, besides, cannot be designated as "the Point at the entrance of the Haven". Apart from being well within the distance run by Cartier, the designation cannot apply to them. Cap-aux-Os is situated where the bay is several miles wide, and it is many miles too far down the bay. Sandy Beach might be called the Point at the entrance of the outer bay or harbour,

but it is a narrow, tide-swept spit, unsuitable for a landing place and the erection of a cross. As to Peninsula, it cannot be considered as "the Point at the entrance of the haven".

2. O'Hara's Point, on the other hand, seems to suit the description. This point is of the "barachois" type, common in Gaspesia; it is low and open and situated at the extreme Western end of the Narrows leading from the outer to the inner harbour or Basin of Gaspé. The water is bold and the ship channel through the Narrows approaches the point closely. It is the natural landing place of shipping and boats frequenting the harbour; practically the greater volume of the water-borne business of the port is today transacted upon it.

3. Cartier mentions the use of boats, thereby indicating that he had the narrow and shoal channel examined and sounded before bringing his ships through to the anchorage in the inner basin. Any cautious mariner would do likewise before risking vessels in narrow, unknown waters.

The Narrows of Gaspé Harbour or Basin are described in THE ST. LAWRENCE PILOT as follows:-

"The entrance to the South-West Arm, about 360 yards wide between two sandy points; but the navigable channel, which is buoyed, is contracted by shoals on either side to about 120 yards and 27 feet of water can be carried in mid-channel. There are no good leading marks into Gaspé Basin; vessels therefore must be guided by the chart and by the eye."

4. Cartier mentions a mackerel fishing ground. Such were the Narrows until mackerel deserted the coast.

5. Distance from Point St. Peter to the Harbour, alone, would be in favour of this Point. The description, moreover, confirms this presumption.

6. Cartier states that the cross was erected - "Upon the point at the entrance of the said Haven". O'Hara's Point is the only one within the bay that answers fully this description.

7. Upon the Indian Chief raising objection apparently to the erection of the cross, Cartier attempted to explain to him that "The cross was but onely set vp to be as a light and leader which wayes to enter into the Port". Evidently Cartier was a shrewd

observer; possibly having in mind how well situated this point would be if ever a light was required for the purposes of navigation. Later mariners were of the same opinion, for, during many years and until recently, the lighthouse which guided shipping into and out of the port stood upon the extreme end of this point, not many feet distant from the spot where Cartier's cross must have been erected. See ST. LAWRENCE PILOT, which describes it as follows:-

LIGHTS.- "From a square wooden lighthouse, 37 feet high and painted white, erected on O'Hara's Point (the NORTH entrance point to the SOUTH-WEST arm), is exhibited at an elevation of 38 feet above high water, a fixed RED light visible 7 miles in clear weather."

Weather diaries of the author in connection with the direction of storms in July, 1903 to 1910.

- 1903 July 8, cloudy; 9, strong East wind, fog and rain; 10, East wind, fog and rain; 11, fine.
- 1904 July 11, Northeast wind, fog and rain; 12, Northeast wind, fog and rain; 13, Southeast wind veering to South, rain and fog; 14, weather moderating, fine.
- 1905 July 8, Northeast wind, very stormy, rain; 9, Northeast wind, rainy; 10, fine.
July 24, stormy, wind strong N.E. to E., rain, fog;
25, conditions unchanged, wind Northeast, rain; 26, Northeast wind, rainy; 27, clearing.
- 1906 July. Weather throughout month fine; no disturbance sufficiently marked to classify as storm; weather warm, on the whole, with an occasional thunder-storm and showers; winds moderate, South during day and Westerly during night and early morning - on the whole a fine month.
- 1907 July 4, Northeast wind, fog and rain; 5, Northeast wind, fog and rain; 6, Northeast wind, fog and rain.
July 9, strong East wind, rain and fog; 10, Northeast to East wind, rain, fog and very stormy; 11, Northeast wind, rain, fog

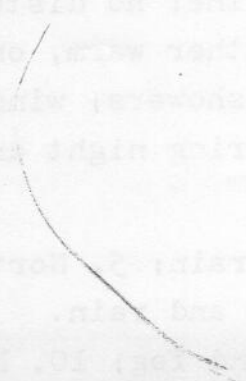
12, Northeast wind, rain and fog; 13, Northeast wind, rain and fog; 14, weather clearing.

July 19, Wind during day Northeast to Southeast settling down to Northeast, rain and cloudy; 20, strong Northeast wind, fog and rain; 21, storm continues, wind Northeast, rain; 22, stormy, rain, wind South to Southeast; 23, unsettled, more moderate; 24, rainy, very strong Southeast breeze; 25, Southeast wind inclined to veer towards the South, very high wind and a very heavy storm, rain; 26, unchanged; a very heavy storm; 27, no change in conditions, strong Southeast to South winds; 28, weather improved, storm moderating; 29, fine.

1908 July: no stormy weather this month.

1909 July 1, rainy, wind moderate Northeast; 2, Northeast wind, rain; 3, cloudy weather, Northeast wind; 4, conditions unchanged, Northeast wind; 5, Northeast wind, rainy.

1910 July 4, rainy, moderate Northeast wind veering to North to Northwest; a very heavy breeze from Northwest quarter. July 24, unsettled; 25, Northeast wind, rain and storm; 26, Northeast wind, rainy and stormy; 27, Southeast wind, stormy, rain; 28, conditions unchanged; 29, conditions unchanged; 30, conditions unchanged; 31, wind more moderate shifting to South, rainy but clearing.



POSTSCRIPT

Had Fred. Richmond, together with the master mariners and seamen that he consulted, lived to see what has been done in the name of progress to the Narrows at the entrance of Gaspé Basin, they would have been devastated. Entrance to one of the most beautiful and historic anchorages in Canada has been effectively and permanently blocked by the building of the present bridge across the Narrows. How incredulous Cartier and his weary seamen would have been to be told in 1534, that one day in the future the very channel by which their storm battered ships reached peaceful haven would be blocked for shipping forever.