

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

2

NEW RELATION OF GASPEZIA...LE CLERCQ

In October, 1675, more than three centuries ago, Father Chrestien Le Clercq, a missionary of the Recollet or Reformed Franciscian Order of France, landed at Percé in Gaspesia.

For more than a decade Father Le Clercq lived among and taught the native Micmac Indians of Gaspesia from Gaspé Bay to Restigouche and along the far shore of Bay Chaleur from Nepisiguit (Bathurst) to Miramichi.

In 1691 Father LeClercq published in Paris his remarkable account of his Gaspesian experience and observations - NEW RELATION OF GASPEZIA. It is this historic account, a unique part of Gaspesia's literary heritage, that is recalled in this issue of GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY.

KEN ANNETT

NEW RELATION OF GASPESIA

In 1910 the distinguished Maritime historian, Dr. William Ganong, translated and edited Father Chrestien Le Clercq's book on Gaspesia for publication by the Champlain Society of Canada. The NEW RELATION OF GASPESIA - With the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians, was published together with a reprint of the original text and was supplemented by the inclusion of early, rare maps of Gaspesia, illustrations from the original edition and extensive footnotes that provide insight into early Gaspesian history. Of particular significance in the Champlain Society publication is the account of the invention and development of the hieroglyphic system of characters by Father Le Clercq to convey to the Gaspesian Indians the message and prayers of the Catholic Church.

In his INTRODUCTION to this important work, Dr. Ganong set the stage for the work of Father Le Clercq as illustrated by the following extract:

" The Gulf of St. Lawrence lies right across the ancient way to Canada, and all that part of its coast which is south of the track of the ships forms a remarkable semi-circle, sweeping grandly round from Gaspé on the north to the Isle of Cape Breton on the east. This region exhibits physical features so different, and has had a history and development so largely distinct, from Canada on the west and Acadia on the south, as to make it well-nigh, even though not quite, an independent geographical and historical province. It was first explored and mapped, in large part by Cartier, who found there a considerable Indian population. Later it became the resort of French fishermen and traders, and was the field of the labours of many a zealous missionary. Then it was the scene of the efforts of the Denys, father and son, to establish a vast seigniorial estate and a separate sub-government. In time it became the refuge of exiled Acadians, and for a while was the only Acadia. Finally, its historical

" distinctness persisted even to our own period, for it received the ancestors of its present English-speaking settlers direct from Great Britain as well as by way of the older English colonies. Yet, strangely enough, in all this time it never achieved a name of its own. At first it was viewed as nothing but an indefinite part of New France; later it was treated by many as a part of Acadia; to the Denys it was only, "Les costes de la Grande Baye"; a few called it Gaspesia...

To this coast, as a missionary to its Indian tribes, there came in 1675, a Recollet priest of marked capacity, Father Chrestien Le Clercq, who laboured for nearly twelve years in the Indian settlements from Gaspé to Miramichi, and after his return to France, published a book describing these Indians and his life among them. This is the book, this is the author and this is the subject which form the theme of the volume now before the reader..."

THE AUTHOR - FATHER CHRESTIEN LE CLERCQ

Chrestien Le Clercq was born in 1641 in the Artois district of France at Bapaume, a village that lies within the triangle formed by the larger centers of Amiens, Arras and Cambrai. The district now lies in the French Department of PAS-DE-CALAIS. Readers of SPEC may recognize the natal district of Father Le Clercq as one that became all too well known to men of Canada's Armed Forces in the Great Wars of the 20th Century. In World War I, Canadians fought there and many died in resisting German invasion of France. In World War II, Canadian Divisions liberated Calais and its hinterland once more from German occupation.

Chrestien Le Clercq entered the novitiate of the Recollet or Reformed Franciscan Order and, in 1675, came out to Quebec in New France to serve as a missionary. It is said that his assignment to the Gaspé mission was the result of the personal intervention of the Governor, Count Frontenac. It should be noted that a Jesuit missionary, Father Exuper Dethunes, had preceded Father Le Clercq in Gaspesia, having served at Percé from 1673. After a stormy

voyage downriver from Quebec, Father Le Clercq reached Percé on October 27th., 1675 and took up residence for the winter months at the fishing and trading establishment of Pierre Denys, Sieur de la Ronde, at Petite Riviere, the site of the modern Barachois.

THE MISSION- EARLY YEARS

During the winter of 1675 Father Le Clercq set to work to learn the language of the Gaspesian Indians and began to experiment with a system of hieroglyphic characters by which the Indians could be taught to interpret the message and prayers of the Church. With the coming of summer he moved west along Bay Chaleur to the important Indian encampment at Restigouche to live and work among them. In the autumn he moved on from Restigouche to Nepisiguit (Bathurst of today) where a fellow countryman, Philippe Enault, Sieur de Barbaucannes, had a fishing and trading post.

In January, 1677, Father Le Clercq, accompanied by Philippe Enault, set out from Nepisiguit for Miramichi where Richard Denys, Sieur de Fronsac, was established. The difficulties of their ten-day trip through the wilderness, in mid-winter, were recounted in graphic detail in the later writings of Le Clercq. At Miramichi he remained until Spring, working among the Indians that he referred to as the Cross-bearers and perfecting his remarkable system of hieroglyphics that would remain as one of his great pioneering achievements.

By 1679 Father Le Clercq had been in his isolated mission field for some four years and we learn from a letter written to his Father Superior that he was becoming discouraged as a result of the many frustrations and difficulties of his life in a primitive land. From his Superior he received a message of encouragement and arrangements were made, evidently, for him to spend part of the winter season of 1679 at Quebec. In the Spring of 1680 he sailed from Quebec for France, stopping enroute at Percé where the Gaspesian Indians gathered to say "au revoir" in eloquent speeches of gratitude and affection. His safe return home to France closed the first phase of his Gaspesian mission and afforded him the opportunity to report to his Order and to visit with relatives and friends.

THE LATER MISSION - 1681-1687

Father Le Clercq returned from France to his mission in Gaspé in 1681 and over the following six years proceeded to labour for God and his Church among the Micmac Indians at Restigouche, along Bay Chaleur and Gaspé. His experiences and keen observations of all aspects of Indian life of that time, so long ago, would be recalled and recorded in his NEW RELATION OF GASPEZIA. Lest the reader wonder at the use of the word NEW in the title, it is the considered opinion of scholars that he deliberately included it to distinguish his book from the well-known RELATIONS of the Jesuit Order.

In 1686 Father Le Clercq dedicated, at Percé, the Chapel of St. Peter. Only four years later, in 1690, following his final return to France in 1687, Percé was pillaged and sacked by American privateers and the Chapel of St. Peter desecrated. A letter of Father Jusneau, Recollet missionary at Percé in 1690, describing the sack of Percé, was included by Father Le Clercq in his NEW RELATION OF GASPEZIA.

THE FINAL YEARS

Following his return to France in 1687, Father Chrestien Le Clercq became the Superior of the Monastery of Lens. In 1691 the first edition of his 600 page book, NEW RELATION OF GASPEZIA, was published in Paris. It was dedicated to the author's patroness and friend, Pelagie Chabot-Rohan, Princess d'Epinoÿ, the widow of Alexandre Guillaume de Melun, Prince d'Epinoÿ.

Father Le Clercq published other works significant to Canadians prior to his death in 1697. His patroness, the Princess d'Epinoÿ died at Versailles a year later, in 1698.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS OF "NEW RELATION OF GASPESIA"

CHAPTER I

ON GASPESIA IN GENERAL.

A general description of Gaspesia. Contains a detailed account of the destruction of the settlement at Ile Percé in 1690 by American privateers. Very valuable footnotes by Dr. Ganong on the origin of the Gaspé mission, the arrival of Father Le Clercq, and his early labours.

CHAPTER II

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE
GASPESIANS

The origin of the native Gaspesians both according to their traditions and European speculations. Theme of the worship of the Cross among the Indians of Miramichi.

CHAPTER III

ON THE BIRTH OF THE
GASPESIANS

Remarkably clear, matter-of-fact and detailed description of Indian birth customs and of Indian home life in general, providing fascinating glimpses of primitive society. May constitute the most revealing material in the book.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE CLOTHES AND
FINERY OF THE GASPESIANS

Observations on Indian dress, ornaments, painting of the face, dressing of the hair and other related matters. Deals with the innate modesty of the Gaspesian Indian women.

CHAPTER V

ON THE WIGWAMS AND
DWELLINGS OF THE GASPESIANS

Detailed description of Indian wigwams and their home life - both material and moral.

"Nowhere in literature is there a better picture of home life of the Indians".

CHAPTER VI

ON THE MANNER OF LIFE
OF THE GASPESIANS,
AND ON THEIR FOOD.

Treats of the food, cooking, famines, suffering and occasional cannibalism of the Gaspesian Indians, with much valuable detail.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE IGNORANCE OF
THE GASPESIANS.

Observations and examples of the "ignorance" and the natural cleverness of the Indians. An account of the system of hieroglyphics designed by the author, Fathér Le Clercq, to aid the memory of converts in remembering their prayers.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE LANGUAGE OF
THE GASPESIANS.

An all too brief account. Description of the Gaspesian Indian language as very beautiful and rich in its expressions. Indian speeches very elegant and expressive. Comment on choice of personal names among the Indians.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE RELIGION OF
THE GASPESIANS

An account of the ancient Indian worship of the Sun. (Also dealt with in the writings of Dr. John Clarke on Gaspesia) Indian prayers. Theme of the worship of the Cross by the Indians.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE
WORSHIP OF THE CROSS
AMONG THOSE GASPESIANS
CALLED CROSS-BEARERS

Develops the thesis that the Gaspesian Indians worship the Cross long before the Europeans came to New France. This thesis was based on the tradition that Cross worship had been revealed to the Indians through dreams in a time of extreme destitution, privation and desolation and had become a firm tradition

CHAPTER XI

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ARDUOUS
VOYAGE OF THE AUTHOR ON
HIS WAY TO ANNOUNCE THE
FAITH TO THE CROSS-BEARER
GASPESIANS.

A long, well-written and interesting narrative of the author's adventurous, mid-winter voyage through the wilderness from Nepisiguit to Miramichi. Valuable references to existing settlements and proprietors, e.g. Richard Denys, Sieur de Fronsac at Miramichi and Philippe Enault, Sieur de Barbaucannes at Nepisiguit. The author's period of discouragement and wavering in his mission. Text of supporting letter from his Superior, Father Le Roux.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE BELIEF OF THE
GASPESIANS CONCERNING
THE IMMORTALITY OF
THE SOUL.

The Indian tradition and belief concerning PAPKOOTPAROUT, ruler of the Land of Souls and the way in which he gave to men the gift of corn and tobacco. The Indian concept of a desirable future life.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE SUPERSTITIONS
OF THE GASPESIANS.

Fascinating account of the role of Indian jugglers or medicine men and of the many superstitions prominent in daily lives and habits. How certain Indian men and women assumed functions and role of priests.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE RULERS AND THE
LAWS OF THE GASPESIANS.

The duties and the limited authority of the Chiefs. The striking concept of "noblesse oblige". Treatment of law-breakers. Indian customs with

CHAPTER XV
ON THE CUSTOMS OF
THE GASPESIANS.

Keen comment on the customs of the Gaspesian Indians. Their admirable physique and sturdy health. Their simple and peaceful life. Hospitality. Certain peculiarities of Indian temperament. The modesty of Indian women. The author does not spare their unclean habits, eating manners, and ravages of drunkenness. Strong denounces of the liquor traffic introduced by Europeans.

CHAPTER XVI
ON THE MARRIAGE OF
THE GASPESIANS.

"The father and mother of our Gaspesian leave to their children the entire liberty of choosing the person whom they think most adaptable to them". Details of typical courtship and marriage customs. Grief of the Indian at the loss of a wife.

CHAPTER XVII
ON THE MANNER IN WHICH
THE GASPESIANS MAKE WAR.

The Indian mode of making war. Accounts of battles with their hereditary foes, the Esquimaux. Traditions as to the origin of their strife. Lingering fear of the Mohawk Indian tribe.

CHAPTER XVIII
ON THE HUNTING OF
THE GASPESIANS.

Treats of the hunting of the moose, beaver and other animals. Lists and comments on the various mammals, birds and fish to be found in Gaspesia. The prestige accorded the successful hunter in Indian society.

CHAPTER XIX
THE FEASTS, DANCES AND
AMUSEMENT OF THE GASPESIANS

The high place held in the lives of the Indians by innumerable feasts. The many kinds of speech-making associated with such feasts. Description of Indian Dances and Games.

CHAPTER XX
ON THE REMEDIES, DISEASES
AND DEATH OF GASPESIANS.

The few remedies that were sufficient in healthy Indian lives. Interesting comment on sickness, death and funeral customs.

CHAPTER XXI
FIRST RETURN OF THE AUTHOR
TO FRANCE AND THE SPEECH
THAT THE CHIEF OF THE
GASPESIANS MADE TO HIM
ON HIS DEPARTURE.

This final chapter of Father Le Clercq's book was retrospective in that it recalled his first voyage back to France in 1680. The text of the speech made at Percé by his Indian foster father. His visit in France and his return to Gaspesia in 1681

NOUVELLE
RELATION
DE LA
GASPESIE,
QUI CONTIENT

Les Mœurs & la Religion des Sauvages Gaspesiens Porte-Croix, adorateurs du Soleil, & d'autres Peuples de l'Amérique Septentrionale, dite le Canada.

DEDIE'E A MADAME LA
PRINCESSE D'EPINOY,

*Par le Pere CHRESTIEN LE CLERCQ,
Missionnaire Recollet de la Province de
Saint Antoine de Pade en Artois, &
Gardien du Convent de Lens.*

A PARIS,
Chez AMABLE AUROY, rue Saint
Jacques, à l'Image S. Jérôme, attenant
la Fontaine S. Severin.

M. DC. XCI.
AVEC PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

THE TITLE PAGE OF FATHER LE CLERCQ'S
BOOK ON GASPEZIA, PUBLISHED IN PARIS,
FRANCE, IN THE YEAR 1691.



AN EARLY 20th CENTURY VIEW OF GASPESIAN FISHING CRAFT
IN THE SHELTERED HARBOUR OF BARACHOIS. IT WAS HERE
THAT FATHER CHRESTIEN LE CLERCQ SPENT HIS FIRST WINTER
IN GASPESIA AT THE FISHING AND TRADING ESTABLISHMENT
OF PIERRE DENYS, SIEUR DE LA RONDE, IN 1675.