

GASPE OF YESTERDAY

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BENJAMIN HOBSON - PIONEER SCHOOLMASTER

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Some time past my fellow Gaspeian and esteemed colleague, Lionel Allard, contributed a series of interesting articles on the early history of the Roman Catholic schools of Gaspeia to the REVUE D'HISTOIRE DE LA GASPE. As the beginnings of English Protestant education may not be generally known it seems appropriate to recall something of the heritage of English education in this series on GASPE OF YESTERDAY.

Though English families began to settle in Gaspeia soon after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, some twenty years were to pass before the arrival of some four hundred Loyalists and disbanded soldiers in 1784 created a significant concentration of English settlers at New Carlisle on the Bay Chaleur. We are fortunate to have the nominal roll of these early settlers who embarked at Quebec in June, 1784 en route to new lands on the distant Bay Chaleur and find listed many family names to be found on the Gaspe Coast to this day. Among those sailing on the ship "POLLY" was Benjamin Hobson, who is worthy of remembrance and honour as a dedicated, pioneer schoolmaster in Gaspeia.

A Loyalist, Benjamin Hobson served in the army of General Burgoyne. He fought at Ticonderoga and through the military campaigns associated with the American Revolution. At the end of the war, in victory for the Americans, Hobson, like thousands of his fellow Loyalists, came to Canada. For a time he continued to receive pay as an army lieutenant but soon had to seek other employment. He found a temporary post as a schoolmaster at Quebec before responding to a call for a teacher at Camp Machiche which provided transient accommodation for the families of dispossessed Loyalists and disbanded soldiers on the shores of Lake St. Peter between Quebec and Montreal. There, no doubt, he would have come to know Captain George Law, Sr., who had distinguished himself in the successful defence of the fortress city of Quebec from the

threat of American invasion by Montgomery and Arnold in 1775. It would be Captain Law whom the Government would appoint to superintend the movement of the Loyalists from their temporary camps to new lands on Bay Chaleur and deal with the many problems arising from the New Carlisle settlement.

When the flotilla of small vessels and whaleboats bearing the Loyalists sailed from Quebec it carried not only Benjamin Hobson but his future school pupils. For along with their parents the children on board the various ships included:

<u>SHIP</u>	<u>CHILDREN</u>	
ST.PETER	49	
LIBERTY	25	
POLLY	58	
ST.JOHN'S	2	TOTAL...134.

Many of these children would have been enrolled as pupils in Hobson's school at Camp Machiche as he reported having a class there of some 60 to 90 students. His dedication as a schoolmaster is revealed by his statement that for five years he had not received salary as a teacher.

While official records reveal that Benjamin Hobson was schoolmaster at New Carlisle from 1786, it is reasonable to assume that the school opened earlier -as soon as suitable accommodation could be provided. The Loyalist settlers included many well-educated persons who placed a very high priority on education of their children. Thus English education in New Carlisle is approaching its bicentennial. This long tradition, unequalled in the Province of Quebec apart from the garrison centers of Quebec and Montreal, is worthy of suitable recognition and observance.

Born in 1737, Benjamin Hobson was forty-seven years of age when he came to settle at New Carlisle. He shared the hardships of the pioneer settlers during those first lean and difficult years. It was not until 1791

that the distant government at Quebec first granted him a schoolmaster's salary of £ 25 per annum. It was not until 1810 that this annual salary was raised to £ 50.

Following the Act of 1801 the school of Benjamin Hobson at New Carlisle was included as one of the Royal Schools of the Royal Institution For the Advancement of Learning. Such Royal school were governed by general regulations of the Royal Institution and by local regulations drawn up by the trustees of each school. The following local regulations of a typical Royal School may be of interest in placing the schooling of Hobson's era in context:

- Each child taught at this school shall pay two shillings per month; each month parents shall be free to withdraw their children without penalty; but if the month has begun the schoolmaster shall be paid for the full month.
- The school room will be heated by the fathers and mothers of the children attending school; the amount of fuel shall be 15 cords of sound hardwood, cut for easy entry to the stove; 5 cords shall be delivered by October 8th., and the remainder at Christmas.
- The schoolmaster shall heat his living quarters at his own cost.
- The schoolmaster shall not absent himself at anytime without legitimate cause; should he be absent he must make up the time lost from his holidays.
- The schoolroom shall be swept and scrubbed by the pupils in turn.
- The schoolmaster shall have a month of holidays from August 15th. to September 15th. School shall reopen on September 16th.
- The schoolmaster shall light the fire in the classroom stove

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each morning early enough that the children do not suffer.

- Firewood for the school shall be carried in by the pupils in turn.
- The classroom shall not be used for other purpose than for the instruction of youth.
- The schoolmaster shall maintain good order in his school and shall not allow pupils to leave without good reason.
- The schoolmaster shall teach all branches of education that he is capable of to his pupils and shall seek their advancement to further education

LONG LIVE THE KING !

(Signed by the Trustees)

The records of the Royal Institution list the Commissioners of the school at New Carlisle, up until 1823, as follows:

H. O'Hara, Esq.
Jas. Sherar, Esq.
Amasa Beebe, Esq.
Robt. Sherar, Esq.
Rev. J. Suddard.
J. Caldwell, Esq.

In his report to the Royal Institution of June 6th., 1820, Benjamin Hobson wrote:

"...having served loyally in the army and, since my arrival in Canada, having kept school for forty years, and being now eighty-three years of age, I trust this information will be favourably received...."

To the credit of the government at Quebec, the Governor, by a letter dated December 3rd., 1822, granted Benjamin Hobson an annual pension of £ 30 for the rest of his remaining years. His place as the pioneer schoolmaster of New Carlisle was then assumed by James

In recalling the career of Benjamin Hobson as a pioneer of English education in Gaspesia the limitations of space do not permit account of other early schoolmasters in the English communities of the Gaspe Coast. At Gaspé a contemporary of Hobson, James Mills, born 1756, served as schoolmaster and private tutor to the family of Hugh O'Hara, Esq. At nearby L'Anse aux Cousins, Charles Davis, the son of a distinguished Massachusetts family, was schoolmaster as early as 1792. On the South West Arm of Gaspe Bay (now Wakeham) John Eden was schoolmaster, lay reader, Sunday school organizer and Justice of the Peace. The Malbay community had George Hall as an early teacher and later had Joseph S. Tuzo, a Bermudian who chose to settle on the Coast. The career of Joseph Tuzo and the influence of his descendents would be worthy of a chapter of Gaspesian history. Ambrose Howel was among the early schoolmasters of Douglastown as was W. Tilley at Cape Cove.

Readers of SPEC who have information that will contribute to the record and tradition of early English education in Gaspesia are urged to communicate it. We are reminded by every auto licenseplate that the motto of Quebec is JE ME SOUVIENS. In the spirit of that motto it is incumbent to trace and record the origins and influence of two centuries of English education in Gaspesia.

The Reverend J. P. Mills

Secretary to the Royal Institution &c

Rev. Sir,

Quebec

I have the honor of your communication of 27 January last with the printed Queries which you submit to me for my answer respecting my School in New Carlisle, and to which I now answer without any delay

1st — I have held the appointment of Schoolmaster in New Carlisle for the space of thirty five years, complete on 1st July — I began here to state that in the character of a Loyalist I entered the Army of General Burgoyne then laying at Ficondorego, and was in all the different actions up to the Period of the Capitulation when I was sent into Canada with the other Loyalists, and the Provincial Government allowed me Lieutenant's pay for my Maintenance and Support, and upon getting to Quebec I opened a School the Emoluments of which formed an addition to my above Income, and at the end of which time I went to Machiche and opened School for the Benefit of the Children of the Loyalists who were Stationed there by Government, and continued there^{ly} allowed Lieutenant's pay by Government but without any Salary in the name of Schoolmaster, and that during the whole time of my said Teaching which was for five years I charged no School Wages, but taught all my Scholars Children of the Loyalists gratis, and I have to state that the Scholars I taught of this description during the above Period were from thirty to Ninety in Number.

I further certify that for several years after my arrival in New Carlisle I had no Government allowance for being Schoolmaster, notwithstanding that the Lieutenant's pay which I formerly had was discontinued by the Provincial Government to me from the date of my said arrival.

There are no Synods, none having ever been appointed by Government.

From the above the Board of the Royal Institution will receive what I trust will be considered a full and particular answer to all the queries contained in your Letter addressed me of the above date, and should only beg leave to add that having been exposed to a good many hardships and Dangers in his Majesty's Service while with the Army under General Burgoyne with the Character of a Loyalist, and having since my coming into
into Canada conducted a Government School as the Master for forty years, and now having actually attained the eighty third year of my age I trust that my Representation through you of these Circumstances will be favorably attended to by Government.

My present Exertions are as arduous as my age and Health can possibly admit of; but I ^{now} find them unequal to attend on the Business of teaching during the enclementments of Winter for several years past.

I should be happy to attend to any directions you may do me the honor to transmit to me

I Am Reverend Sir

with the greatest Respect
your Obedient and very
Humble Servant

Benjamin Hobson

Newcastle 6 June
1870