

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

16

THE DAVIS FAMILY OF GASPÉ

PART I

Charles Davis, founder of the Davis family of Gaspé, descended from a family that could trace its American residency to the time of the Father of New France, Samuel de Champlain.

This account deals with the settlement of Charles Davis in Gaspé, his marriage with Harriet Patterson, and the story of their children.

THE DAVIS FAMILY OF GASPE

(PART I)

At Paxton, Massachusetts, in August, 1785, a son, Charles, was born to Colonel John Davis and his wife, Phoebe Stearns Davis. As Charles Davis would grow up to settle in distant Gaspesia and be the founder of the Davis family of Gaspe, it is of interest to recall his family background and to attempt to trace his career and that of his Gaspesian descendents. In terms of a time frame it might be noted that the birth of Charles coincided roughly with the settlement of the Loyalists and veteran soldiers along Bay Chaleur in Gaspesia and some ten years after the American armies of Arnold and Montgomery had failed in their attempt to capture the fortress city of Quebec.

Dolor Davis, who crossed the Atlantic from his native England to settle at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1634, was the patriarch of the Davis family of New England. He was in America in the same decade that the Pilgrim Fathers landed from the "MAYFLOWER" at Plymouth and thus was a contemporary also of Samuel de Champlain at Quebec in New France.

Samuel, son of Dolor Davis, born 1639, married Mary Meadows and established his home at Concord, Mass. Their son, Simon Davis, born 1683, married Dorothy Heald and the given name of Simon descended to their grandson, Simon Davis, Jr. born 1714.

Simon Davis, Jr., grew up to marry Hannah Gates and to make his home at Rutland, Mass. Their son, John, was born there in 1752. In the direct line of descent of Charles Davis, later of Gaspe, it was of the marriage of this John (Colonel John Davis) and Phoebe Stearns, his wife, that Charles Davis was born at Paxton, Mass., in August, 1785. It is of interest to note that his mother, Phoebe Stearns Davis, was a descendent of Isaac Stearns who had reached America from England in 1630.

Isaac Davis, an older brother of Colonel John Davis, continued to live at Rutland, Mass. His son, John, of his marriage with Anna Brigham, grew up to become the Governor of the State of Massachusetts and to serve as an American Senator and representative of the U.S.A. abroad. He and his cousin, Charles Davis, continued to correspond long after Charles had settled in Gaspé.

Reminiscence of the youthful years of Charles Davis run through the letters written to him at Gaspé, in later years, by his brother, George. There is reference to the family home at Paxton...."the old mansion is still there occupied by sister, Phebe and her son, Charles"...." The school days of Charles as a student at Leicester Academy are recalled and particular mention made of the enquiries ~~made~~ about him by his former schoolmaster, Dr. Flint. Much detail is given of family members and relatives. "...Cousin Davis (Governor John) spoke of you affectionately and told me that he had prepared a letter for you.....John Davis is all and more than he promised to be when you were so intimate with him and knew him so well. He has justly merited all the honors that have been bestowed upon him. He is among the small number who stand the first in point of talents in this country..." Though George's letters offer no specific explanation as to why his bother, Charles, decided to leave his home and family to travel to Canada as a young man, there is some reason to believe that it was in search of a better climate for his health. In or about the year 1808 Charles Davis arrived in the city of Quebec where he found a position as a teacher of Latin in a school of the Old Capital. His stay in Quebec was not, however, of long duration, for within a year or so he was off to distant Gaspé Bay where he would establish his permanent home.

The only indication that we have as to why Charles Davis moved on from Quebec to Gaspé is that he was advised by his doctor to go and live near the sea. While the reasons for his choice of Gaspé are not known definitely, it is probable that during his stay in Quebec he had met and become friends with

Gaspeians who are known to have come to Quebec by sea in those days. Such travel is reflected in the early records of the Anglican Cathedral of Quebec where the adult baptism of such first generation sons of Gaspe Bay as William and George Annett and Benjamin Coffin is to be found. These hardy Gaspeians sailed their own, home-built schooners to Quebec and as there was no clergyman in Gaspe in those early days, seized the opportunity to be baptized while in port. Other Gaspeians that Charles Davis may well have met would have been the sons of Felix O'Hara of Gaspe, who came to Quebec for their education. Also in Quebec was the family of the Lieut-Gov. of Gaspe, Colonel Francis Le Maistre. It is therefore quite possible that Charles Davis had occasion to meet Gaspeians and to have reached a decision to move on to Gaspe Bay with such new friends. That such decision was not unusual is evident from the following extract of a letter of "Aunt" Maria Languedoc Tuzo (Mrs. John Tuzo) recounting how her father, Joseph Languedoc, came to Gaspe:

".....MOTHER'S (Eliza Ann Boyle) BROTHER WAS CAPTAIN FELIX BOYLE -HE USED TO GO WHALING AND DO EXTREMELY WELL AND IN AUTUMN HE USED TO TAKE HIS OIL TO QUEBEC TO SELL. HE MET IN WITH JOSEPH LANGUEDOC AND HE CAME TO GASPE WITH HIM AND MARRIED HIS SISTER, ELIZA - THAT WAS MY MOTHER - AND THEY MOVED TO QUEBEC AND REMAINED SOME TIME AND THEY MOVED BACK TO GASPE AND SETTLED HERE....."

For a time following his move to Gaspe, Charles Davis served as a pioneer schoolmaster. His background of education in New England and his teaching experience in Quebec would have been a precious asset to the early families of Gaspe Bay who appreciated education but had little access to formal schooling.

In Gaspe, Charles Davis was soon to find a wife in the person of Harriet

Ascah. As the Patterson and Ascah families were pioneer English settlers at York and Peninsula respectively, Charles Davis, by marriage, was linked to two of Gaspé's pioneer families whose descendants continue to live on the shores of Gaspé Bay.

One of the earliest and interesting items to be found in the Davis Papers is a letter to Charles Davis, Southwest, from William Fleming, Peninsula, dated April, 1813. The following attempt is made to present its faded and rather obscure text:

"Dear Sir,

I received yours with great satisfaction and in return I have sent you a few lines as an Elegy On the death of Thomas Boyle -

Come honest Muse my breathing instruments inspire
to sooth the sorrow of a friend's decease
With rapture sweep the sounding lyre
and symphony mark each humble voice

A fairer sun did never gild life's azure sky
more hopeful prospects one ne'er did invision
No storm suspected to assail such day
nor no suspacion of the lest alarm

But ah! when rising to his meridian height
When all his lustre in refulgence shone
emergent darkness' cold perpetual night
and dispel'd his brilliant rays at noon

5.

Stupendious Heaven ! how soon thy summons obey'd
that heart once pregnant with conjugal fire
in earth's dark chambers are forever lay'd
Where alternate day and night is ever fair.

But gentle reader look back and view his life
Who like a potentate ranged the mighty deep
e'en to Old Neptune's -- adamant reef(?)
the lurking monsters forth did sweep

With gentle care or great exerted skill
himself contages (?) to the monster huge
then with good aim a potent hit full
which made the monster 'eld to Death's subterfuge

But ah! how little proved his bane
perhaps one draught of some unkind, infectious air
so in death's cold sleep I must remain
and to my cell all mortals must repair

I hope to hear from you as soon as possible,

so I am yours,

Sincerely,

Peninsula

(signed) Wm Fleming

April 10, 1813

This Elegy of the death of Thomas Boyle, noted whaler and mutual friend of William Fleming and Charles Davis must surely rank as one of the earliest poetical compositions of Gaspesia. It is interesting to reflect that at the time it was written the War of 1812-1814 was in progress between Canada and the United States while in Europe the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo

The "JOURNALS" of Archdeacon George J. Mountain, relating to his early missionary visits to Gaspesia, record that at Gaspé, Charles Davis was a lay-reader and active member of the Anglican Church. The resident missionary was often absent on travels over his far-flung Mission and in his absence it was Charles Davis who read the services of the church. His name appears often in the early Church records of Gaspé Bay as a god-parent at baptisms, witness at weddings and visitor to the homes of the settlers on the various shores of the Bay. The Archives of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec have copies of letters written to the Bishop of Quebec by Charles Davis concerning Church matters in Gaspé - letters that clearly reveal his superior education and ability to express himself with clarity and eloquence.

The Gaspé home of Charles and Harriet Patterson Davis was blessed with the family of four sons and four daughters shown on the appended chart. Of these eight, first generation descendents, only John, Captain John Samuel Davis, did not marry.

The sons of Charles Davis were of a generation of the families of Gaspé Bay whose enterprise and accomplishments have been ably recalled in our time by Dr. David McDougall of Concordia University in such studies as :

SHIPBUILDERS, WHALERS AND MASTER MARINERS OF GASPE BAY IN THE 19th CENTURY

It was the personal recollection of the late Charles (III) Davis that his grandfather, Charles II and Captain John Davis had themselves built the sturdy schooners that they sailed on whaling and trading voyages from their home port of Gaspé. The DAVIS PAPERS preserve a typical agreement drawn up for a whaling voyage of the schooner, "RAMBLER", Captain John Davis, Master. Of the fifteen signatures (or X marks) to the agreements are those of the following Gaspé men with designated shares in the venture: John Davis, Charles Davis, Felix Annett, James W. Coffin, George Coffin, Abner Coffin, Thomas Patterson, William Patterson. Crew members, who did not share in the venture, were signed on at monthly wages

that ranged from eight to eighteen dollars per month.

In October, 1856, in a letter from L'Anse aux Cousins, Charles Davis wrote to his son, John, who was away from Gaspe on the schooner, "JOHN STEWART" and thought to be at Quebec. His letter provides an interesting glimpse into that distant time:

" L'anse aux Cousins, 7th Oct, 1856

Dear John, You spoke of bringing me some cloth for a common winter coat. It will be as well or perhaps better to bring me a coat already made -one that you can put on easily over another. You had better bring a barrel of corn meal and one less of flour as it makes the most of my bread eating & two or three pounds of snuff, and a small blank book containing about $\frac{1}{2}$ a Quire paper of a cheap kind.

Nothing has transpired since you left worthy of remark. We are all, thank God, in usual health, hoping all has and is going well with you & that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you safe home again,

Your affectionate Father "

Old receipts and statements of account, preserved among the DAVIS PAPERS bear witness to other business ventures and activities. In 1844 John Eden issued a receipt to John Davis and James Mosher for £ 47 in payment of a Mill erected on the brook called Red Creek. This Mill, or its successor, was evidently in operation three years later ^{according to} ~~as evidenced by~~ an 1847 receipt for "mill sawing". In a letter to John Le Boutillier, Esq., John Davis and James Mosher wrote, in part, "... WE BEG YOU WILL BE SO KIND AS TO LET US KNOW IF YOU ARE WILLING TO MAKE US THE FOLLOWING ADVANCES FOR THE WINTER & TAKE YOUR PAYMENT IN DEALS NEXT SPRING..." As late as 1865 we find John Baker issuing a receipt for - "...SIXTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY FEET OF INCH BOARDS FOR WILLIAM HYMAN, ESQ., THAT

The old accounts of the Davis brothers with such Gaspe Bay firms as HYMAN and COLLAS & SLOUS provide a fascinating glimpse into the economy and trade items of the Gaspesians of those times now distant. Nor were interests and connections merely local as evidenced by the membership of at least one of the Davis sons in the Masonic Lodge as early as 1857.

The depth and closeness of the bonds within the Davis family find expression in the DAVIS PAPERS. This is a note from Charles (II) to his brother, John, absent on a whaling voyage:

"Gaspe Basin, July 21st., 1865

My Dear Brother,

We have had news from the Straits of Belleisle, a Halifax Trader from that coast brings us news of Capt. Harbour having one whale and not much prospect but we do not get a word from you - we have not even got news of your arriving down safe but we trust all is right on that score. I am anxiously looking for news from you. I hope you are getting some oil - it is likely to be a good price.

You will be surprised when I tell you that today is the first time I have been out from home since you left Gaspe. Little John (son John F. Davis) took me to the Basin today. I have not even been to Aunt Ellen's since you left.

..... Give my respects to Felix Annett, Abner Coffin, James Coffin, Henry Patterson, Uncle Tom, etc. saying their families all well. Tell George Coffin that his Father has been badly hurt from a fall from a Cart but is getting quite better again... excuse these hasty lines. I hope the next will be better

I remain your affectionate Brother,

signed CHARLES

While it is beyond the scope of this outline to deal in any detail with the contents of the interesting letters of George Davis of Massachusetts with his brother, Charles, of Gaspé, it can be noted that their correspondence reflects deep and abiding affection between family members, feelings of loss and genuine sadness at long separation, and an update of news regarding relatives and mutual friends. George Davis continued to write to his brother, Charles, until his death at Yonkers, N.Y., in 1863, at the age of 82 years. Correspondence between the Massachusetts and Gaspé families was continued by Charles Boynton with his Uncle Charles Davis of Gaspé and subsequently with his Gaspé cousin, Charles Davis II.

Part II of the Davis Family of Gaspé will deal with times within the memory of Gaspésians yet living in recalling the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Charles and Harriet Patterson Davis. It will refer to the late but still well-remembered Gaspé firm of JOHN F. DAVIS & SONS, MERCHANTS AND SHIPPING AGENTS. It will recall the firm's founder, John F. Davis and his sons, George and Charles Davis III, who were all, in their time, prominent business men and leading citizens of their native Gaspé.

BACKGROUND AND FAMILY OF CHARLES DAVIS, I. OF GASPE

DOLOR DAVIS - 1593

England and Cambridge, Mass.

SAMUEL DAVIS & MARY MEADOWES -1639

Concord, Mass.

SIMON DAVIS & DOROTHY HEALD -1683

Holden, Mass.

SIMON DAVIS JR. & HANNAH GATES - 1714

Rutland, Mass.

COLONEL JOHN DAVIS & PHOEBE STEARNS -1752

Paxton, Mass.

CHARLES DAVIS- M. - HARRIET PATTERSON

1811

JAMES GEORGE	MARGARET HARRIET	PHOEBE JANE	JOHN SAMUEL	CHARLES THOMAS	SOPHIA ANNIE	WILLIAM HENRY	CAROLINE ADELAIDE
b. 1812	b. 1814	b.1815	b.1820	b.1823	b.1826	b.1828	b.1831
M	M	M	S.	M	M	M	M
ELIZA JANE HACKETT	WILLIAM BAKER	JAMES COFFIN		ELIZ. ANNE COFFIN	JOHN BAKER	JULIA PATTERSON	JOHN ALEXANDER

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