

GASPE OF YESTERDAY

28

THE KEMPT ROAD

OPENED BETWEEN 1830 AND 1833
TO PROVIDE A LAND LINK FROM
BAY CHALEUR TO THE RIVER ST.
LAWRENCE, THE KEMPT ROAD WAS
ONE OF THE EARLY AND SIGNIFICANT
ROUTES OF GASPE.

KEN ANNETT

THE KEMPT ROAD

The opening of the Kempt Road in the years 1830- 1833, from Metis on the St.Lawrence to Restigouche at the Head of Bay Chaleur, via Lake Matapedia and the course of the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers, was an event of great significance for Gaspesia. Primitive as the first trace of the road was, it represented a vast improvement over the wilderness trails that preceded it and that had been followed by the Indians from prehistoric times. Up until that time the Gaspé Peninsula had been, in terms of land communication, remarkably isolated. Its exploration, early settlement, and contacts with the older settlements along the St.Lawrence had been, to a unique degree, by sea. Now, some two hundred years after Jacques Cartier had sailed the Bay Chaleur and raised the Cross on the shores of Gaspé Bay, a first land link was forged between Gaspesia and the St.Lawrence.

This account proposes to recall briefly the opening of the Kempt Road and some of the people associated with its early days. In the tradition of the motion picture, the roll-call of personalities - the "DRAMATIS PERSONAE"- of the Kempt Road could include:

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| THE MICMAC INDIANS | - | WHO DISCOVERED THE TRAILS AND TRAVELLED THE ROUTE FROM ANCIENT TIMES. |
| COUNT FRONTENAC | - | AS GOVERNOR OF QUEBEC HE MADE THE ORIGINAL GRANT OF THE SEIGNEURY OF MATAPEDIA IN 1694. |
| SIEUR NICOLAS-JOSEPH | <u>2</u> | FIRST, BUT ABSENTEE, SEIGNEUR OF MATAPEDIA. |
| D'AMOURS | | |
| PATRICK LANGAN | - | WITH JOHN MCKINDLAY BOUGHT SEIGNEURY LANDS FROM D'AMOURS HEIRS. |
| ISAAC MANN | - | LOYALIST SETTLER AT RESTIGOUCHE. TRAVELLED ROUTE AND SUBMITTED EARLY PLAN FOR ROAD TO |

- THE GOVERNOR AT QUEBEC.
- JOSEPH BOUCHETTE - SURVEYOR, MAP MAKER AND EARLY QUEBEC AUTHOR.
EXPLORED MATAPEDIA ROUTE IN 1815.
- JAMES McNIDER - MERCHANT OF QUEBEC AND SEIGNIOR OF METIS. SETTLED
METIS AND PROMOTED ROAD BUILDING. RECOMMENDED
MATAPEDIA ROAD TO SIR JAMES KEMPT.
- ARCHDEACON MOUNTAIN - REV. GEORGE JEHOSEPHAT MOUNTAIN - LATER THE THIRD
ANGLICAN BISHOP OF QUEBEC. WROTE VIVID ACCOUNT OF
HIS JOURNEY FROM RESTIGOUCHE TO METIS IN 1824.
- SIR JAMES KEMPT - GOVERNOR OF QUEBEC AFTER A VERY DISTINGUISHED MILITARY
CAREER WITH WELLINGTON IN SPAIN AND AT WATERLOO. VERY
SUCCESSFUL AS GOVERNOR OF QUEBEC.
- JAMES CRAWFORD - EXPLORED ROUTE AT PERSONAL REQUEST OF GOVERNOR AND
REPORTED FROM NEW RICHMOND AND CASCAPIEDIA IN 1824.
- WILLIAM MAC DONALD - CROWN LAND AGENT IN GASPEZIA. SURVEYED ROUTE IN 1829.
APPOINTED A COMMISSIONER TO OPEN THE ROAD. WROTE
LETTERS AND REPORTS FROM NEW CARLISLE.
- ROBERT FERGUSON - FELLOW COMMISSIONER OF MAC DONALD FOR OPENING OF
KEMPT ROAD.
- FREDERIC FOURNIER - PROMISING YOUNG SURVEYOR, AGED 22 YEARS, TRAGICALLY
DROWNED JUNE 1831 IN THE OPENING OF THE KEMPT ROAD.
- MAJOR J.A. WOLFE - RETIRED VETERAN SOLDIER. PIONEER FOUNDER OF VALCARTIER
SETTLEMENT. IN CHARGE OF CREWS OPENING KEMPT ROAD.
- PIERRE BROCHU - AN ORIGINAL MEMBER OF SURVEY CREW OF KEMPT ROAD.
FIRST SETTLER ALONG ROUTE. KEEPER OF POST AT TÊTE DU
LAC (SAYABEC). CLEARED A FARM. LUMBERMAN.

- MARCEL BROCHU - SON OF PIERRE BROCHU. FIRST TO SETTLE AT AND KEEP THE POST AT LA DECHARGE (AMQUI)
- JONAHTAN NOBLE - A LOYALIST WHO SETTLED AT MIRAMICHI. BURNT OUT IN GREAT MITAMICHI FIRE. FIRST TO SETTLE AND TO KEEP POST AT "LES FOURCHES" (CAUSAPSCAL)
- THOMAS EVANS - FIRST KNOWN KEEPER OF THE POST AT ASSAMETQUAGHAN (ROUTHIERVILLE)
- LIEUT. J.W.GORDON - ROYAL ENGINEERS. INSPECTED AND REPORTED IN DETAIL ON KEMPT ROAD IN 1839.

ROUTES IN PERSPECTIVE

While much has been recorded about the St.Lawrence route and of its major tributaries, the Saguenay, St.Maurice, Richelieu, Ottawa, those routes of eastern Quebec leading from the St.Lawrence overland to Atlantic tidewater have received much less publicity and attention. Any account of the Metis - Lake Matapedia - Restigouche route, the axis of the Kempt Road, should be prefaced by some perspective of those other, and roughly parallel, lines of communication that were known to the Indians and later adapted by the French, and, ^{in turn,} ~~later~~ by the British, for military and civil use.

Of three such routes, the most westerly started from the site of Quebec and following the Chaudière River valley to the highlands beyond Megantic, crossed to the headwaters of the Kennebec River and thence to the Atlantic Coast. A very ancient route of nomadic Indian tribes, this line of communication was used by the British garrison of Quebec during the winter of 1759-60 following the Battle of the Plains. General Murray found himself isolated by the winter closing of navigation on the St.Lawrence and cut off from vital communication with British bases on the Atlantic coast of New England. One of Murray's

alert and competent young officers, Lieutenant John Montrésor, on patrol in the Beauce region south of Quebec, hears stories of the old Indian route into New England. With the dispatches and blessing of Murray, Lieut. Montresor led a small party southward out of Quebec in mid-winter. After experiencing great hardship and near starvation, Montresor succeeded in finding the Kennebec valley, descended it to the sea, and delivered General Murray's dispatches. The map and notes that Lieut. Montresor made of the Chaudière-Kennebec route later fell into the hands of the Americans at the time of the Revolution and were used by General George Washington and Benedict Arnold in the planning of Arnold's military expedition against Quebec in 1774-75. It may be noted that part of the route that Montresor mapped is known today to motorists as THE ARNOLD TRAIL while the Chaudière route honours the memory of the late American President, John F. Kennedy.

A second route, some one hundred miles to the East of Quebec, ran from Kamouraska on the St. Lawrence via Lake Temiscouta and the Madawaska and St. John rivers to Acadia (St. John on the Bay of Fundy and Halifax) Long known to and travelled by the Indians this route was widely used by French explorers and military expeditions. It is said that experienced couriers could carry dispatches by this route from Quebec to the mouth of the St. John river in five days. When New France fell the British continued to use this route. The settlement of Loyalists in New Brunswick and the displacement of the Acadian people to new regions, such as Madawaska, provided new dimensions to this route. Today it carries the Trans-Canada Highway from Quebec to the Maritimes.

The third route, again another hundred miles to the East, that from Metis to Restigouche, to be developed as the Kempt Road, had long been known to the Micmac Indian people. But unlike the other two routes mentioned above it appears to have remained virtually unknown to non-Indian travellers until after 1800. For though vast lands about Lake Matapedia had been granted as early as 1694

by Count Frontenac to Sieur Nicolas-Joseph D'Amours, the territory remained an unsettled wilderness - a virtual "TERRA INCOGNITA" - for more than a century. When representations to open a road did come, after the traumatic events of the American Revolution and the War of 1812-1814, it was from the growing settlements at either end of the route - from James McNider, Seigneur of Metis, who was settling and developing his lands on the St. Lawrence and from such active Restigouche Loyalists as Isaac Mann who was only too familiar, from personal experience, with the hardships of wilderness travel from Bay Chaleur to the St. Lawrence. Then too, memories were still fresh of two wars involving American invasion of Quebec, and as a consequence the need of providing a route for military purposes at some distance from the American border.

EARLY TRAVEL AND REPORTS

Among the earliest advocates of the opening of a road from Restigouche to the St. Lawrence was Isaac Mann, Esq., of Restigouche, near the Head of Bay Chaleur. He submitted a proposed plan of the route to the Governor of Quebec, stressing the military as well as civil value of a link by land between the Provinces of British North America. The Journals of Archdeacon G.J. Mountain confirm that Mr. Mann had travelled the wilderness route many times on his way to and from Quebec and that he placed confidence in the Indians of Restigouche who, on occasion, acted as guides.

In 1815 the Quebec surveyor, map maker and author, Joseph Bouchette, explored the Matapedia route and reported upon it. Over the next decade those known to have travelled the wilderness route included James Crawford, Esq., of Cascapedia and New Richmond, the Gaspé Land Claims Commissioners, including M. Taschereau and Robert Christie, Esq., a party of surveyors and groups of persons from the crews and passengers of ships wrecked on the lonely St. Lawrence coast. Mr. Crawford, writing from New Richmond to the Governor at Quebec in May, 1824,

states that in accordance to the Governor's wishes, expressed to him personally at Quebec, he had:

"...explored the Valley of the Matapedia and penetrated the Matapedia Portage to Mr. McNider's Mill, about a league below Grand Metis"

(Note- The Matapedia Portage extended from Metis to the Head of Lake Matapedia)

In the same year of 1824, Archdeacon George Jehoshaphat Mountain, later the Third Anglican Bishop of Quebec, recorded in his JOURNAL a vivid and fascinating account of his journey from Restigouche to Metis with two Indian guides some ten years before the opening of the Kempt Road. The arrangements for his journey having been made at Restigouche by his host, Mr. Mann, Archdeacon Mountain set out by canoe on Sept. 13th. Mr. Mann accompanied him on the first stage of his trip. The JOURNAL's record of the ascent of the Matapedia river, of the Indian encampment at "Little Lake" (Salmon Lake), of the traverse of the "Great Lake" (Lake Matapedia) and of the trials of the Portage from the Head of Lake Matapedia to the shore of the St. Lawrence must rank as one of the classics of the Gaspesian heritage. From the Seigniory of Metis, reached on Sept. 19th., Archdeacon Mountain wrote:

"...I was now to part with my Indians, who solicited a written testimony of their good conduct & competency to conduct travellers by the route which we had travelled - and this I could most conscientiously & did most willingly give.....my Indians were settled proprietors at Restigouche & Mr. Mann & his son never hesitated to trust themselves in the hands of the tribe..."

ROAD WORK BEGUN

Writing from New Carlisle in 1829, William MacDonald stated that he had made a new, and evidently more detailed, survey of the proposed Kempt Road. In the following year, 1830, the actual work of opening the road began. The Commissioners responsible to the Legislature were William MacDonald and Robert Ferguson - their progress reports are to be found in the Journals of the Legislative Assembly. The direction of the work crews was entrusted to Major J.A. Wolfe, a distinguished, veteran soldier who was one of the founders of the Valcartier settlement near Quebec. Over the years 1830 - 1833 some \$ 30,000 was appropriated for the survey and opening of the ninety-seven mile route from Officer's Brook, near Restigouche to the Metis Seigniory on the St. Lawrence.

The opening of the Kempt Road was to give the valley its first resident colonist. Pierre Brochu of St.Vallier and St.Henri de Levis came to work on survey of the route and remained to settle at TÊTE DU LAC (SAYABEC) where he cleared farm land, kept the first POST or MAISON DE REPOS for travellers along the Kempt Road. He resided there for some forty years, until his death in 1871, and was a true patriarch of the region. His son, Marcel, established himself at the opposite end of the Lake, where he kept the POST at LA DECHARGE, the forerunner of Amqui. It may be of interest to Gaspesians to recall that Xantippe, daughter of Pierre Brochu, grew up to marry Mr.Olscamp of Restigouche. She lived to the age of ninety-five, until the year 1910.

The POST at the present site of Causapsca, known in earlier days as LES FOURCHES (THE FORKS) was kept for years by Jonathan Noble and subsequently by his son-in-law, George O'Reilly, who had married Elizabeth, daughter of Jonathan Noble. A dispossessed Loyalist, Jonathan Noble had settled for a time at Miramichi only to be driven from that location by the Great Miramichi Fire. He moved to Restigouche and from there moved inland to clear land about the FORKS. The

present Church in Causapschal is said to stand on the site of Jonathan Noble's pioneer establishment.

Before leaving the subject of POSTS along the early Kempt Road mention should be made of ASSAMETQUAGHAN (Routhierville) where Thomas Evans is recorded as a pioneer settler. When the weary traveller finally reached MATAPEDIA he would have found the thriving Fraser establishment, before reaching the end of the route and tidewater.

The opening of the Kempt Road was marked by at least one event of high tragedy. In June, 1831, a very promising young man, Frederic Fournier, was accidentally drowned while surveying between Lake Matapedia and Salmon Lake. He was only twenty-two years of age.

After 1833, the traveller from Metis to Bay Chaleur would have found the route from the St. Lawrence passable - possibly the best part of the road. At the Head of Lake Matapedia a ferry scow took travellers the length of the Lake to the present site of Amqui. From Amqui onward the road became increasingly difficult. Along the Matapedia valley the traveller could just pass on horse back or by dog and sled in winter. Repeated warnings are on record that MAIL SERVICE would have to be discontinued if the road conditions were not improved.

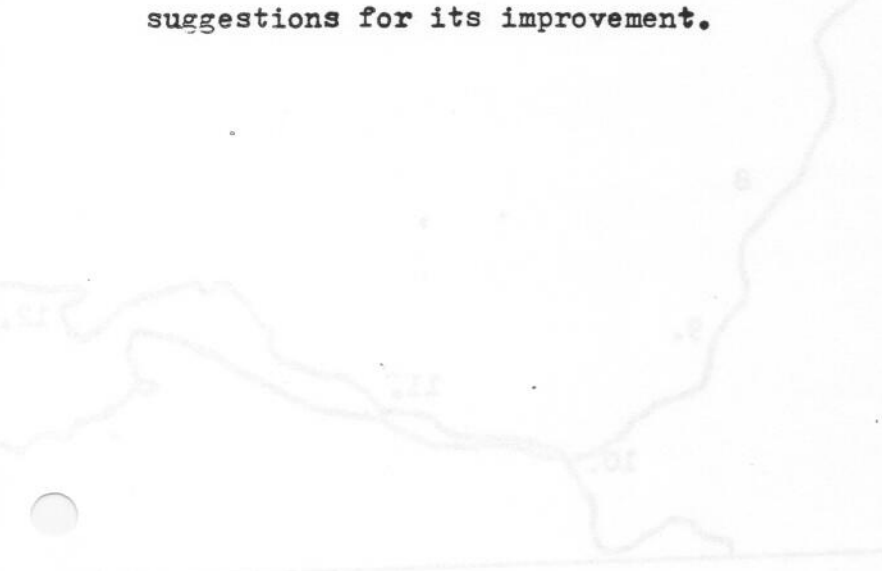
It is beyond the purpose and scope of this article to recount the long and fascinating story of the Matapedia Seigneury. Two hundred years after its grant by Count Frontenac to Sieur D'Amours in 1694, claims were still being advanced by D'Amours descendents. Over the last century many individuals and corporations have had a hand in its history and development. But that is another chapter of GASPE OF YESTERDAY.

IN CONCLUSION

Though the career of Sir James Kempt may now be forgotten and even the name of the Kempt Road, fading with time, the fine Gaspeian communities of Highway #132 bear witness to Sir James Kempt's policy and action in promoting the

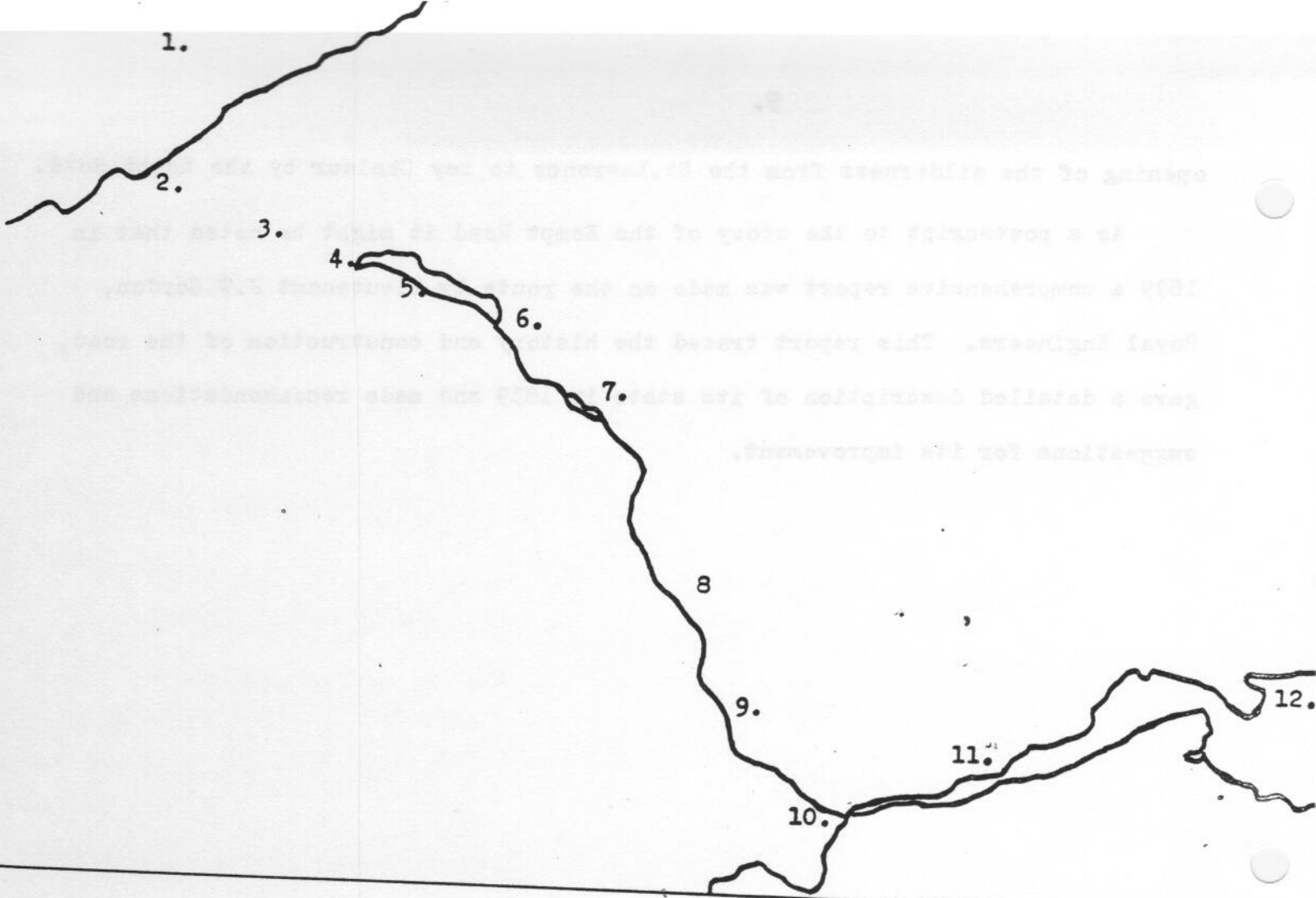
opening of the wilderness from the St.Lawrence to Bay Chaleur by the Kempt Road.

As a postscript to the story of the Kempt Road it might be noted that in 1839 a comprehensive report was made on the route by Lieutenant J.W.Gordon, Royal Engineers. This report traced the history and construction of the road, gave a detailed description of its state in 1839 and made recommendations and suggestions for its improvement.



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REFERENCE SKETCH OF ROUTE OF KEMPT ROAD - METIS TO RESTIGOUCHE

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| 1. ST.LAWRÈNCE | 7. "LITTLE LAKE" (SALMON LAKE) |
| 2. METIS SEIGNIORY | 8. THE FORKS (CAUSAPSCAL) |
| 3. MATAPEDIA PORTAGE | 9. ASSAMETQUAGHAN (ROUTHIERVILLE) |
| 4. TETE DU LAC (SAYABEC) | 10. MATAPEDIA-RESTIGOUCHE JUNCTION |
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