

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

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WILLIAM CUTHBERT

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In the era when Britain was locked in bitter struggle with Napoleonic France and some years prior to the Battle of Waterloo, William Cuthbert came to settle in New Richmond.

There, as a prominent lumberman, ship-builder and merchant he established a wide reputation as a man of business and influenced the development of the community.

## WILLIAM CUTHBERT

Among Gaspesians of Yesterday distinguished for enterprise and influence, the name of William Cuthbert is deserving of remembrance. As a merchant, ship builder and community leader he became so well known in his time that his fellow citizens of Bonaventure County elected him as their Member in the Legislative Assembly. He served them well in that capacity from 1848 to 1851.

Born in Scotland c. 1795, William Cuthbert descended from the Cuthberts of Inverness whose family history extended back into antiquity. Before the dragon ships of the Vikings made landfall on the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Cuthbert family was prominent in Scotland. One of its members, the Scottish monk, St. Cuthbert, was an associate of the Venerable Bede, whose biography he recorded, and was Bishop of Lindisfarne in the first half of the 8th century A.D. The ancient Cuthbert family crest bore the motto "FORTIER" (Strength or Courage). This motto was modified in later generations to read "NEC MINUS FORTIER" (With No Less Strength or Courage). The significance of the family motto is reflected in the life of many Cuthbert descendants including that of John Cuthbert, a contemporary of Jacques Cartier, who served as the High Sheriff of Inverness c. 1542.

Like the Vikings before them, the sons of Scottish families migrated to the New World across the Atlantic in their search for a new and better life. There is good reason to believe that William Cuthbert came first to Prince Edward Island and from there moved on to settle at New Richmond c. 1812. It is known that his brother Daniel emigrated to the United States, that his sister, Agnes, wife of Andrew Turner came with her husband and children to join William at New Richmond in 1812. Another brother, Robert, remained in Scotland to become a prominent shipowner of Greenock, William's cousin, Robert Langwell, came to New Richmond and for a time was in partnership with Cuthbert until he returned to Scotland.

The move of William Cuthbert from Prince Edward Island to Gaspesia was but one instance of interesting

links of Island families with the Gaspé Coast. Not far from New Richmond, Matthew Stewart, son of Robert and Annabella Stewart of P.E.I. settled on lands of the Shoolbred seigneurie and became widely known in Gaspesia for his business activities.

At New Richmond William Cuthbert set up a store, engaged in lumbering and the timber trade and established a shipyard at Shipyard Point. In the Journal of William Logan, the famous geologist, is found interesting reference to Cuthbert's enterprises at New Richmond in 1844. Logan had descended the Cascapedia River with his small party and Indian guides in birch bark canoes after an epic trek across the Gaspé Peninsula from the St. Lawrence at Cap Chat. He was in urgent need of funds and sought out William Cuthbert at his store to present his Letter of Credit. He reports that Cuthbert was away at his shipyard, where one of his vessels was in the final stages of construction. On his return he received Logan, a fellow Scot, most hospitably. Logan was deeply impressed by Cuthbert's knowledge of events and the scope and success of his activities.

One of the last of the vessels built by William Cuthbert at New Richmond bore the name of his wife, Christiana Montgomery. She was the daughter of Donald Montgomery, a native of Argyllshire, Scotland, who for more than three decades was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island. Mrs. Cuthbert's brother, Donald (1808-1893) was, successively a Member of Parliament, a Legislative Councillor and a Senator of Canada from 1873 until his death. The Montgomery family was a large one as Christiana reportedly had sixteen brothers and sisters.

In 1828 William Cuthbert was appointed a Justice of the Peace and in the following year, on May 1, 1829, he was named as a Commissioner for the improvement of the road from New Richmond to Bonaventure that skirted the north shore of the Bay Chaleur for a distance of some 21 miles. His community interest and leadership has been noted by the historian of St. Andrew's United (formerly Presbyterian) Church of New Richmond, Mrs. Mary Campbell of Grand Cascapedia. He was a major contributor to the building fund of 1839 and a consistent

subscriber to its operating costs until his death.

Under the Union Act, Canada's constitution from 1840 until the British North America Act of 1867, Bonaventure County sent a single representative to the Assembly of the Province of Canada. William Cuthbert was elected in 1848 as the successor to John Le Boutillier and served as Member for Bonaventure until November, 1851.

Although the career of William Cuthbert may have touched that of the better documented Cuthbert family of Berthier-en-haut at a number of points, including service as a Member of Parliament, such relations remain to be established. However a brief sketch of James Cuthbert and his family may be relevant and of interest?

Yet another son of the ancient Cuthbert family of Scotland, James Cuthbert had a distinguished military career. As a Lieutenant of the British Marines he fought with distinction at Cartagena and was selected to carry back reports of the British victory to England. He became the first Commanding Officer of the famous Black Watch Regiment. He fought at Louisbourg and at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759. General Murray chose him to carry dispatches on the Fall of Quebec to London. Returning to Canada he served on Murray's General Staff until his retirement from the army.

In 1765 James Cuthbert acquired the Seigneurie of Berthier and in the years following added to his land, Lanoraie and Maskinongé seigneuries. At Berthier he built his great Manor House and St. Andrew's Chapel, one of the first Protestant churches in Quebec. The Manor House was sacked and burned by the American invaders of 1775 but subsequently rebuilt.

As a member of the Legislative Council under James Murray and Guy Carleton, James Cuthbert had an influential role in Quebec. His sons, Alexander, James and Ross Cuthbert were all active and influential in public life. As James and Ross, in particular, were contemporaries of William Cuthbert of New Richmond there is good reason to believe that they met and shared their common family traditions.

In 1854, having undertaken a voyage to Scotland, William Cuthbert went first to Greenock where there were large shipyards and from thence to Liverpool. It was there on July 13, 1854, that he was stricken with serious illness. On the advice of Dr. David Macrevie of Liverpool he was taken to the home of his nephew, William Cuthbert of Rocky Ferry on the banks of the Mersey across from Liverpool. There, on August 3, despite all that Drs. Macrevie and Hamilton could do, he died. He was buried in Greenock in his 59th year.

The widow, Christiana Montgomery Cuthbert, survived her husband for almost four decades to die on July 3, 1891, at the age of ninety-eight years. A son, Andrew, died as a young man. A daughter, Anne, married Dr. Hartwell Thornton, a son of Richard Thornton of Bradford, Yorkshire, England. Only five years after her father's death in Liverpool, Anne lost her husband through his death at New Richmond in June 1859 at the early age of thirty years. Their son, Dr. H.W. Thornton, died at New Richmond in 1907 as a result of injuries received in the burning of his home.

This sketch of the life and times of William Cuthbert is indebted to the notes of the late Gaspesian historian, Mrs. Margaret McWhirter of New Richmond included in Reports of the Royal Society of Canada, to the voluminous documentation on the Cuthbert family of Berthier in the Archives of Quebec and to correspondence with Mrs. Mary Campbell of Grand Caspédia. It is presented to SPEC's readership at large in the hope that those with additional information on the career of William Cuthbert will record it and so contribute to a more complete and definitive biography.