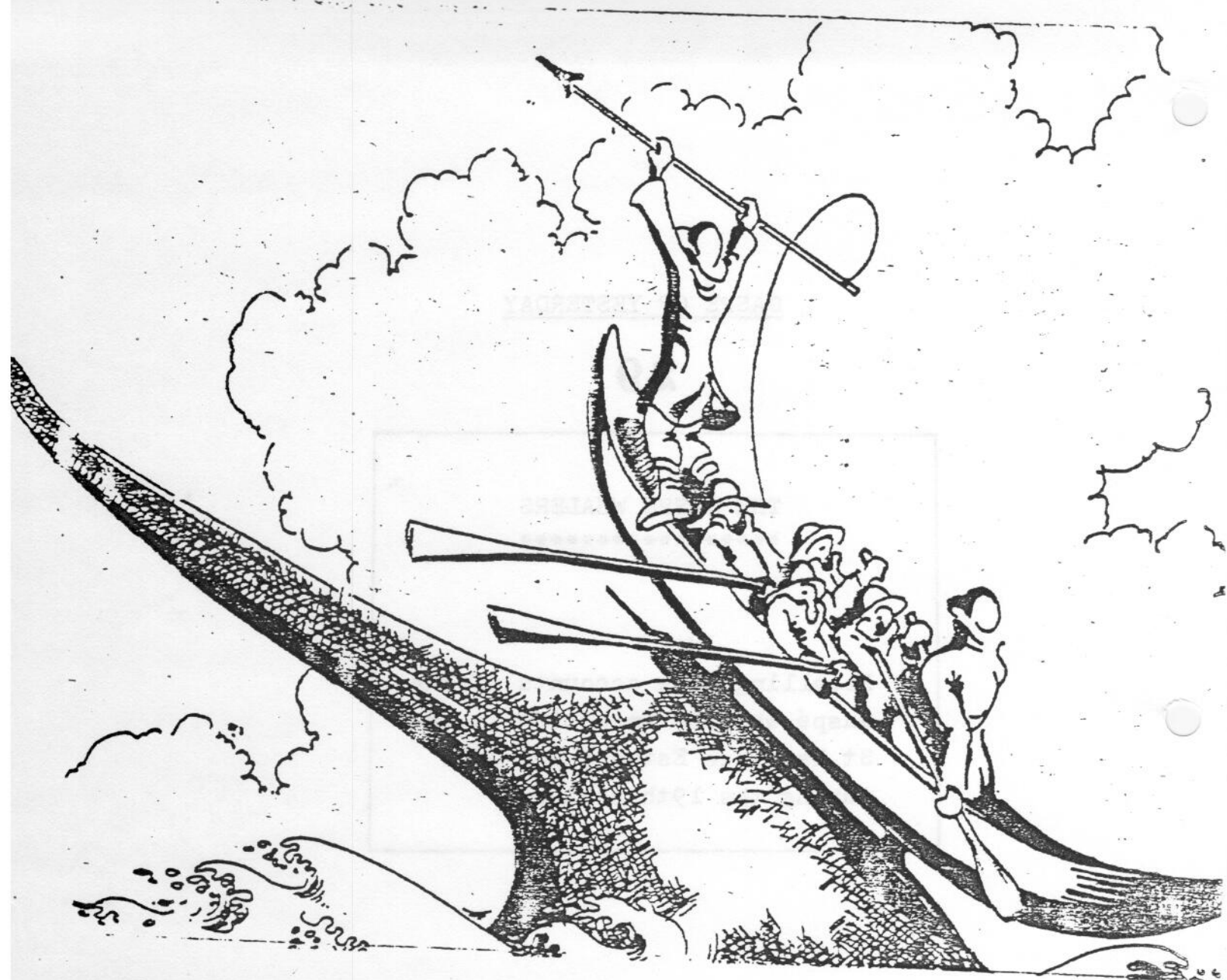


GASPE OF YESTERDAY

29

THE GASPE WHALERS

Recalling some accounts of the
Gaspé whalers in action in the
St.Lawrence Estuary and Gulf
during the 19th century.



THE GASPE WHALERS

" I MUST GO DOWN TO THE SEAS AGAIN...
TO THE GULL'S WAY AND THE WHALE'S WAY
WHERE THE WIND'S LIKE A WHETTED KNIFE...

SEA-FEVER - JOHN MASEFIELD

" LAUGH AT FEAR :
PLUNGE IT DEEP, THE BARBED SPEAR :
STRIKE THE LANCE IN SWIFT CAREER :
GIVE HIM LINE : GIVE HIM LINE :
DOWN HE GOES THROUGH THE FOAMING BRINE !"

OLD WHALING CHANT

"THAT IT MAY PLEAFE THEE TO FUCCOUR,HELP, AND COMFORT
ALL THAT ARE IN DANGER, NECEFFITY AND TRIBULATION;
WE BEFEECH THEE TO HEAR US, GOOD LORD "

1788 PRAYER BOOK OF
CAPT. WILLIAM ANNETT,
WHALER OF GASPE.

In many a peaceful cemetery on the shores of Gaspé Bay rest the remains of the men who, in their day and generation, made the name and reputation of the Gaspé whaler well known and renowned in Gaspesia and far beyond their native shores. When, long years ago, they sailed their home built and eminently seaworthy schooners out of Gaspé Bay, there were no media reporters

or journalists at dockside to chronicle their departure. Radio, to report the storms and perils that they faced at sea, was yet unknown. Nor was there television to catch the high drama of their whaling or to film interviews with returning Captains and their crews. With the passing of time even the tales of their experiences, known to their families and descendents are being forgotten. Fortunately a few, rare accounts of their contemporaries, who saw them in action and recorded their impressions, remain in print. As such accounts may not be readily accessible to Gaspésians, and may be of interest, GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY proposes to recall them.

The Quebec historian and author, James McPherson Le Moine, a grandson of the well-known Gaspésian, Daniel McPherson of Point St. Peter, knew Gaspé well and of the Gaspé whalers wrote:

Many times during visits to Gaspé I had the opportunity to hear at first hand from these intrepid whalers accounts of the incredible dangers that they had experienced in harpooning whales. I even had the fortunate opportunity to sail on one of these whaling schooners, the "BREEZE", Captain Arbour, but luck didn't favour us. Captains Arbour, Coffin, Annett, Baker, Boyle, Stewart, here were men whose energy and ability as whalers would be honoured in any country.

(Translation from "LES PECHERIES DU CANADÁ")

An interesting account of one of the Gaspé whalers, Captain Boyle, and his crew, in action, exists in a rare, old book entitled, curiously enough, SALMON FISHING IN CANADA - BY A RESIDENT . EDITED BY COLONEL SIR JAMES EDWARD ALEXANDER, KNT., K.C.L.S., 14th REGT. It was published in London, England, in 1860. From the chapter, WHALE FISHING IN THE ST. LAWRENCE, we have the following first hand account of the unknown author in the year 1849:

The Bay of Seven Islands abounds with whales in the summer season, and at a short distance from it, on the 26th of July, 1849, it was

my good fortune to witness, for the first time, the capture of the monster of the deep in the legitimate manner. Two of my companions on that occasion had frequently seen and often described to me, as the most exciting of all sights, the Spanish bull-fight; but if it is fair to form an opinion from their conduct, exclamations and gestures at the period I speak of, I should say that whale fishing must very closely approximate in the feelings it produces to the very best of bull-fights.

We had been for some weeks enjoying ourselves upon the banks of the Mingan and Manitou Rivers, and we were now retracing our course to Quebec in the good yacht, "IROQUOIS", with a light breeze from the eastward, which, when we got about fifteen miles west of the Peroquet Islands, subsided into a complete calm. We were not long in the listless state which such circumstances usually produce, for one of our crew discovered an extraordinary appearance at about two miles distance from us, which, as it was carefully examined by the aid of our telescopes, became more and more strange to look upon. It looked like a brig turned upside down, its masts seeming to rest upon the water, while its hull was elevated in the air, and crowned with two large crescents. This vision quickly changed its form, and the crescents appeared to approach us obliquely, while the hulls of the vessels retained their original shape.

Whoever has sailed in summer among the Mingan and Peroquet Islands has observed many wonders worked by the mirage. In an able paper in the Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, Dr. Kelley noted that : "All the various forms assumed by objects, under the influence of this mirage, seem to be the result of two or more images alternately erect and inverted, either distinct or mingled

But to return to our story. The crescents continued gradually to approach, and, as they did so, to become less elevated at the horns, until after a short time they stood revealed before us in their true character, as two whale boats, each having one man standing in the stern steering with a long oar, and another in the bow armed with the fatal harpoon. Almost at the same instant that we discerned these things clearly, the mist that had previously obstructed our view and distorted what we saw, was withdrawn as the lifting of a veil, and presented to us clearly the whaling vessel to which the boats belonged, and, still more interesting, the whale of which they were in pursuit.

For a considerable time the chase was continued before either of the boats could approach sufficiently near to the leviathan to enable the harpooner to deliver his deadly weapon. Never did I experience more tremulous anxiety than during the time that the whale appeared to be coquetting and alternately alluring and disappointing his pursuers; sometimes displaying his unwieldy bulk on the surface of the water, lying apparently in a state of insensibility, then diving out of sight, leaving the blue waters foaming white behind him.

The instant he descended into the water both boats crews rowed with all their might towards the spot where they deemed it probable he would again rise to take breath. This occurred several times, till at last, upon his rising from his dive, which he did within a few feet of the boat nearest to our yacht, he received the harpoon deep into his flesh. Then arose a shout into the skies, and the stern cry of "Back All!" from the successful boat was answered by a chant from the other.

The instantaneous rush of the infuriated and wounded whale, tearing the little boat freighted with human life through the hissing waters, was terribly sublime. Such was the velocity with which it flew that it literally cleaved out for itself a channel through the deep, "a wall of waters on the right hand and on the left," which was sufficiently high to conceal the adventurous whalers completely from our view till they had attained a distance from us of, I should say, about two miles, when the huge whale, beginning to become exhausted, commenced to move in a circle and so return towards us.

At this period we perceived that, beside the whale in which the harpoon was driven, there was another of much larger size which accompanied every motion of the former; this we subsequently learned was the old or cow whale, whose disposition is said to be mild and inoffensive, except when its young is attacked, when it is as bold as a lion and manifests an affection which is truly interesting. On this occasion the old whale continued to swim round the young one, to roll over in the water as if to allure it from its pursuers, evincing the tenderest maternal solicitude. Then as if aware of the impending peril of her inexperienced offspring, as the boat drew near, she would swim round her calf in decreasing circles, showing the utmost anxiety to draw it seaward, failing in which she would lash the blue waters into foam with repeated blows of the tremendous flukes of her powerful tail, causing reverberations like a thousand thunders; and, to my astonishment, for I had never heard or read that the whale had any such ability, jumping as high out of the water in proportion to her size as I have ever seen a lively salmon or a spotted trout.

Before taking out all the line from the boat's crew, the young whale, in which the harpoon was firmly fixed, began to ascend towards the surface, and the line was then hauled in by the men and coiled away in the tub kept for the purpose by the steersman. The moment the whale came up so as to be

enabled to breathe and blow, "he went smoking off like a locomotive with an express". The men held on manfully to the line, and with oars peaked, ready to be seized in a moment, away again they dashed in the track of the whale. Had they been yoked to a team of wild horses travelling over glassy ice, their rate of travelling could not have been quicker. As they flew along at the tail of the monster, they could see nothing but a white bank of foam, which rolled up before them higher than the bow of the boat, threatening each moment to overflow them.

At length the unfortunate whale slackened his speed, when, the men hauled up to him and the harpooner adroitly darted his lance, a pointed weapon as sharp as a needle, deep into his flesh; again the poor animal made a desperate but short race, at the end of which he was met by the second boat which had kept as near as possible during the chase, and from which he received another wound with the piercing lance. Weakened with loss of blood, which was now spouted forth from his huge nostrils in torrents, the subdued monster soon became passive, and his captors lay off at safe distance to wait the last struggle. This was soon over, for after a few moments of convulsive writhing, there came the final spasm which was terrible to see. The surrounding waters were lashed into foam, and all the previous exhibitions of the huge whale's power were as nothing compared with the incredible strength put forth in the last "flurry" which however gradually subsided till the dying monster wearily elevated his monstrous head considerably above the waves, uttered a groan loud beyond conception and lay a lifeless mass upon the waters which were deeply tinged with his blood.

The two boats then approached the enormous carcass when the whalers put a noose about the tail and towed it slowly towards their vessel. We then lowered our boat and went alongside the whaler, which proved to be the "ELLEN JANE" of Gaspé, commanded and owned by Captain Boyle, a respectable and kind-hearted man, who received us with much civility, and was evidently

much gratified with the valuable capture his men had made. He showed us through every part of his vessel with a subdued cheerfulness and thoughtful alacrity.

We witnessed the process of cutting the blubber off the carcass of the whale, which was done with a sharp instrument with a long handle called a spade, the men while they used it standing upon the floating body of their victim. We remained looking on until one of the fins was cut off and hoisted on board the vessel, and this required the strength of four able-bodied men with a powerful tackle to effect, and until Captain Boyle had caused a large piece of the flesh, resembling an immense round of beef, to be put into our boat - during the whole of which the unfortunate old whale kept snorting and snoring and blowing about us, showing many symptoms of rage and fury, which caused us to remark to Captain Boyle that, "his was a dangerous occupation", when he replied that, "if the Almighty had gifted the whale with a knowledge of his strength, few indeed would be caught",

We then took leave of this worthy man and his companions, and a breeze springing up, which soon freshened to a gale, we lost sight, probably for ever, of those who had afforded us an opportunity of beholding one of the most exciting spectacles which the world can afford.

Dangers are continually incurred in the whale fishery. A boat, almost as frail as a bubble, approaches the side of a whale slumbering upon the ocean, sixty or eighty feet in length, and a harpoon is plunged into his body. His efforts to destroy his tormentors or to escape from them are terrific. The ocean is lashed into foam by blows from his enormous flukes, which would almost dash in the ribs of a man-of-war. Often he rushes at the boat with lightning speed and with open jaws and it is crushed like an egg-shell in his mouth.

In this frightful warfare many are maimed and many lives are lost

soil, yet virtue, humanity, true nobility and the fear of God can live and grow in a whaleship. We met them upon this occasion combined in Captain Boyle, which it would be ingratitude not to acknowledge.

The process of cutting the blubber off the carcass of the whale, which was done with a sharp instrument with a long handle called a spade, the men while they used it standing upon the floating body of the whale. It remained looking on until one of the line was cut off and delayed no longer the vessel, and this required the strength of four able-bodied men with a powerful team; to effect, and until Captain Boyle had caused a large quantity of the blubber, resembling an immense round of beef, to be put into one boat - during the whale of which the unfortunate old whale-boat crewing and working and floating about us, showing every symptom of rage and fury, which caused us to retreat to Captain Boyle that "this was a dangerous operation," upon he replied that "if the Almighty had aided the whale with a knowledge of his strength, few indeed would be caught."

He then took leave of this worthy man and his companions, and a vessel returning up which soon approached to a gale, we found eight, probably ten men, on board who had obtained an opportunity of catching one of the best cutting operations which the world can afford.

Boats were continually launched in the whale fishery, a boat, almost as fast as a hobby, approaches the side of a whale sliding upon the ocean. With an almighty leap in length, and a harpoon is plunged into the body. The effort to destroy his former life or to escape from them are terrible. The crew is lashed into form by blows from his enormous flukes, which would almost dash in the ribs of a man-of-war. Often he rubes at the boat with lightning speed and with great force and is crushed like an egg-shell in his

In this frightful warfare many are killed and many lives are lost.

THE GASPE WHALERS

Though whaling was not a priority concern of the Overseer of Fisheries for the Lower River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, Dr. Pierre Fortin, his official reports to the Government, made from 1852 to 1867, have interesting references to the Gaspé whalers. The following extracts from his reports are typical of his observations, comments and recommendations:

1856 - During the day (September 1st) Captain Baker's schooner, from Gaspé Basin, fitted out for the whale fishery, came into the Bay of Mingan to take in water. I was informed that the shoals of whales are rarely met with in the Gulf, even on the banks which are their most usual resort, so that the whale fishery is not expected to be productive this year.

1857 - It is now proper to make a few observations on the whale fishery, which is carried on in the Gulf of St. Lawrence by whalers who are settled in Gaspé Basin and the neighbourhood.

Eight schooners, of which I here give the names, are employed in this Undertaking :

<u>NAME</u>	<u>TONNAGE</u>	<u>OWNER</u>
"DEFIANCE"	65	Wm. ANNETT & CO.
"JOHN STEWART"	76	CHARLES STEWART
"BREEZE"	45	HARBOUR & MILLER
"VIOLET"	39	HENRY SUDDARD
"ELIZABETH"	52	JOHN LE BOUTILLIER
"H R S"	59	WILLIAM WEST
"PERSEVERANCE"	69	COFFIN & ANNETT
"RAMBLER"	50	Wm. BAKER & CO.

These vessels, manned by eight or ten hands each, and carrying two boats called whale boats, are fitted out in Gaspé Harbour, principally

at the establishment of Mr. John Le Boutillier. The whaling commences in the Gulf about the first of June.

Whales are met with in almost all the lower parts of the River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but more especially on certain banks in which they resort in shoals, doubtless because they find abundant food in those places. Among the species of whales which frequent the Gulf of St. Lawrence four are most remarkable : the BLACK, the HUMPBACK, THE SULPHUR-BOTTOM and the FIN-BACK.

The BLACK WHALE, which is by far the most valuable, is unfortunately not the most numerous ; a few only are met with. In seven or eight years I believe no more than four or five have been killed on our coasts.

The HUMPBACK, yielding from ten to eighty barrels (30 gallons per barrel) of oil, is found in considerable numbers in the Gulf and is easily killed.

The SULPHUR-BOTTOM and FIN-BACK are very difficult to take, on account of their rapid movements when they feel the harpoon. Accordingly, I am informed that it is always necessary to wound them with the lance before harpooning them ; moreover they yield comparatively little oil.

The most favorable places in the Gulf for the pursuit of the whale are the Mingan Shoals, situated between the North Cape in the Island of Anticosti and the River St. John on the North Shore and the St. John's Shoal, lying in a channel in the Straits of Belle Isle, between St. John's Island on the coast of Newfoundland and Great Mecatina Island on the coast of Labrador. According to Mr. Stewart, one of the most experienced persons engaged in the whale fishery of Gaspé, whales pass the winter on the North East coast of the United States and do not resort to the Gulf of St. Lawrence before the end of May. Nearly all the females have at that time a young one, which they guard with great affection and defend furiously when it is in danger. Accordingly, our whalers do not

venture to attack a young whale when its mother is at hand to defend it. Our whalers, making use only of the harpoon, succeed in killing only a limited number of whales yearly, which they almost always succeed in securing and towing to their vessels, where they cut them up.

1859 - The first persons who pursued the whale fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence were fishermen from Nantucket who came to Gaspé Basin during the War of the American Revolution; but it was on a very small scale at first, for their means did not admit of their making extensive outfits. Afterwards, however, they were able to procure larger vessels and make greater profits; and to this day the schooners that are fitted out every year from Gaspe for the whale fishery are chiefly owned by their descendents. These schooners are ten in number, and are manned by nearly two hundred seamen, who are not inferior to American or to English whalers either in skill, in hardihood, or in courage.

The whalers leave Gaspé Basin, where they are fitted out, at the beginning of June, not to return for the purpose of laying up until the middle of September. ...the whaling schooners from Gaspé bring back 20,000 to 30,000 dollars worth of oil each year.

1861 - An official return of the payment of fishing bounties claimed by ship owners of Gaspe included the following, of which a number were engaged in the Whale fishery:

<u>CLAIMANT</u>	<u>SCHOONER</u>
C. STEWART	"JOHN STEWART"
JOHN DAVIS	"OSPREY"
Wm. HARBOUR	"BREEZE"
Wm. BAKER	"RAMBLER"
Wm. ANNETT	"DEFIANCE"
Jos. TRIPP	"ADMIRATION"

<u>CLAIMANT</u>	<u>SCHOONER</u>
JOHN ASCAH	"HIGHLAND JANE"
P. MULROONEY	"VILLAGE BELLE"
F. COFFIN	"PERSEVERANCE"
J. SUDDARD	"VIOLET"
H. WALSH & BROS.	"LORD DOUGLAS"
JOHN HOWELL	"UNDAUNTED"
F. KENNEDY	"TEMPERANCE"
C. ROBSON	"AID"
J. ADAMS	"ORION"
J. ROSS	"BRITANNIA"
GEO. MILLER	"RANGER"

1861 - The reports of Dr. Fortin have a number of dramatic accounts of great storms that plagued seamen in the Gulf. In fact his own armed schooner, "LA CANADIENNE" was wrecked in such a gale and blinding snow storm on the North Shore late in 1861. The following recounts storm conditions as they affected a Gaspé whaling schooner:

October 25, 1861 . The easterly wind which had brought us there, (to Paspébiac) had become, by the next day, a regular gale accompanied by heavy rain. The sea had become very rough in the harbour ...and the boats and small craft could not make their appearance there any more.

During the afternoon, Captain Charles Stewart's whaling schooner, after having lost, in Percé Harbour, her two anchors, had run before the storm sixty miles and was now seen in the offing with her flag flying as a signal of distress.

I immediately sent my long boat, under the command of Captain Bernier,

to her assistance, and notwithstanding the heavy sea, which threatened to swallow up the light craft, he succeeded in conveying to them one of our spare anchors and in mooring her in safety. On the same day, four other schooners came to take shelter under Paspebiac Point ; they reported that the storm was extremely violent outside.

1865 - On the 17th of July, Captain Davis of the whaling schooner "OSPREY" of Gaspé, came into Bradore Bay with a young whale in tow. It was the first that Captain Davis had taken since the commencement of the whaling season. The other Gaspé whalers have been rather more fortunate in their cruises....the weather has been too frequently stormy since the Spring to allow of a productive whale fishery being carried on.

In his 1865 report, Dr. Fortin made a number of recommendations concerning the Gaspé whale fishery, which he considered to be in decline. Encouragement of the whalers should be given in the form of more adequate bounties. The Government should provide formal training of the captains and ship officers of Gaspé in navigation. The whalers of Gaspe should be encouraged to build and equip larger vessels, on the New England model, to enable them to extend the limits of their search for whales beyond the Gulf waters.

1867 - With his election as Member of Parliament for Gaspé in 1867, the remarkable career of Dr. Fortin as Overseer of Fisheries came to an end and his place was taken by Theophile Tetu, Esq. This account of the Gaspé whalers will close with the following extract from his first report:

The port of Gaspé is the only one in Canada that dispatches, as it has done for many years, schooners fitted out for the

express purpose of whale fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At first these enterprises were highly profitable, whales being numerous and readily allowing themselves to be approached by the harpooner. Now, however, both these conditions are reversed - but few whales visiting our coasts and those being so timid that often it is only after having rowed for days in all directions, carefully following the movements of a whale, that the harpooner succeeds in dealing it a blow.

SCHOONERS FROM GASPE BASIN EMPLOYED IN THE WHALE FISHERY IN 1867

SCHOONER	CAPTAIN	TONNAGE	CREW	OIL
"ADMIRATION"	Jos. TRIPP	46	15	200 bbls.
"VIOLET"	HENRY SUDDARD	37	15	180 "
"RAMBLER"	CHARLES STEWART	51	15	170 "
"HIGHLAND JANE	JOHN ASCAH	64	15	237 "
"BREEZE"	Wm. HARBOUR	45	15	80 "
"LORD DOUGLAS"	JAMES BAKER	58	15	96 "

THE GASPE WHALERS

Yet another observer of the Gaspe whalers at first hand was Abbé Ferland of Quebec who visited the distant Missions of Gaspesia and the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and recounted his experiences in such books as "LES COTES DE LA GASPESIE" and "VOYAGE AU LABRADOR". It was on his way to Gaspé Bay, when the vessel in which he sailed was off of L'Anse aux Gris-Fond (Griffon Cove), that Abbe Ferland recorded the following encounter :

On leaving harbour we ran into head-winds; however our misfortune was to the advantage of a schooner that we hailed. She was bound from Chaleur Bay for Quebec and her Captain was asked to give news of us there. The evening was hazy with dark, wind-driven clouds on the horizon. To the windward of us we next observed another schooner of unusual appearance. Two long boats hung from her sides, one to starboard and one to port and along her decks were a dozen or so stalwart crew members who seemed to be ready for adventure. Black, heavy and plowing through the waves, this schooner had the lugubrious appearance of that mysterious vessel of death that according to the tradition of English seamen appears on a mid-summer night to some ship that is destined to perish. Ah well ! the gloom that was spreading over the waves was such as to presage the start of such a terrible night.

But this was not, after all, the "Flying Dutchman" of English marine tradition but a whaling ship of Gaspé Bay with its long, straight and light whaleboats. It carried the crew appropriate for whaling action. This schooner ordinarily cruised between Anticosti Island and the south shore where whales were numerous. For several days past, in fact, there had been scarcely an hour when we did not see several whales surface, blow a column of water into the air, gambol about, plunge three times, then repeat the same performance a little further away. Three or four whales were often in sight at different points, some near us, others two or three leagues distant. These enormous

creatures are, they say, very particular regarding their food and appear to seek out their own special nourishment. When they swim thus, near the surface, they are chasing a very tiny fish that they like to eat very much and that they swallow by the thousands.

After having visited the Mission of Douglastown in Gaspé Bay, Abbe Ferland recorded an interesting account of his visit to the whaling station at Peninsula Point in the inner harbour of Gaspé Bay:

The Bishop wished to visit the whaling station where the Gaspé whalers take their catch. Several boats (of Douglastown) were made ready to take us there and, with the advantage of a light wind, we sailed there in little time. After passing the exterior sand bank (Sandy Beach Bar) we made for another sandy point that extended out into the harbour (Peninsula Point) and on which were several small sheds; these were used to store the whale blubber until it was melted down in great cauldrons so as to extract the oil and grease. The residue was used as fuel for the fires.

The cutting up of the whale was done at sea or in a harbour convenient to the location where the whale was killed. After anchoring the carcass firmly to the side of the schooner, the crew, with spikes attached to the soles of their sturdy boots, climbed out on the inert and slippery body. Armed with spades, knives and hooks, they proceeded to cut off the flesh in long bands which were hoisted by means of a windlass and stored in the hold. The fins of the whale were detached with care and loaded. When the work was finished the crew climbed back on deck, the ropes that had held the carcass were loosened and the remains of the whale sank slowly into the depths of the sea.

The whalers find no difficulty in eating whale meat but only the Indians have the appetite to swallow the fat, the taste of which, they say, resembles that of lard. Oil drips from it even before it is heated by the fires. Such

first oil is ^agreatly superior to that rendered by the heat of the furnaces and commands a higher price.

From our location on Peninsula Point we had a view of the entire harbour together with a large part of the Basin and the village where the aristocracy of Gaspé live. Into the harbour flow the North-West and the South-West Rivers. This inner harbour could shelter an entire fleet; when we were there it sheltered several ships and the Government schooner of Captain Bayfield, employed in mapping the coasts of the District.

The scene of the narrative of Abbé Ferland concerning the Gaspe whalers now shifts to the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence where he had the opportunity to meet two of the noted whaling captains of Gaspé, Captain Stewart and Captain Coffin:

In the course of the afternoon we received news that a whaling schooner was coming into the neighbouring harbour (La Tabatiere) towing an enormous whale. M. Levesque and I were invited to observe the cutting-up operation; the offer was so welcomed that we reached the whaling schooner of Captain Stewart just as his crew were starting work. The whale had just been killed by Captain Coffin, who had received help from Captain Stewart in laying fast to it and bringing it into harbour safely; by traditional agreement Captain Stewart would thus have the right to a third of the prize.

A single thrust of the lance had sufficed to kill this whale which was of the species called SULPHUR-BOTTOM. The whales of this species have remarkable strength and vigour. When they gambol it is not unusual to see them leap completely out of the water in the vertical position. This phenomenon they accomplish by the great strength of their tail. Until recently no one dared to attack them because when they were harpooned they took off with such speed that the whaleboat concerned was invariably drawn under the sea. But,

with long experience, the harpooners learned how to attack them without danger. To strike them they used, not the harpoon but a lance, to which was attached a line with a buoy at its other end. The lance was driven deep behind the whale's fin so as to reach its vital parts. If the lance stroke was accurate and strong the buoy was thrown overboard into the sea as the whale plunged downwards and fled. When the blow was mortal, the whale would eventually surface to breathe its last.

To attack the HUMPBACK whale, whose vigour is less, they use a harpoon with line attached, which runs out and draws the whaleboat after the wounded whale. A man holding an axe stands beside the harpooner ready to cut the line if it becomes snarled or blocked by a knot. The speed of the whaleboat may become so fast that the water will rise six inches above the gunnel on either side. This situation is terrifying for the novice but for the experienced whalers such experience is fun and their skill is such that for some time now no accident has occurred. A HUMPBACK whale is worth much more than the others because it gives up a much larger amount of oil. (In this Abbé Ferland was misinformed as other species of whale gave up more oil)

The whale that had just been killed was about eighty feet long; its huge tail was secured to the bowsprit of the schooner and its head well beyond the ship's stern. As the water was clear its huge form was clearly visible and impressed us as being much larger than the schooner. They expected that it would yield some eighty gallons of oil. It was indeed a lucky stroke of the lance considering that oil now sells at twelve to sixteen dollars a gallon.

As we arrived the crew had set to work to cut it up; large strips of the blubber were being cut off with spades, hoisted aboard by means of a tackle and stowed in the hold of the schooner to be taken to the try-works. Several of the pieces which were measured were up to a foot in thickness.

On the smooth, black skin, not of great thickness, we noted, were attached molluscs, sea shells and whale lice, so named because they grow and fatten on the flesh of the whale.

The captains and crews of the five or six whaling schooners that frequent the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Labrador belong to Gaspé and are the second generation of those stalwart men who, for sixty years, have done battle with these giants of the deep. This year has been a good one for them with few fogs or great storms. Fog prevents the spotting and pursuit of the whales while gales are equally detrimental on account of danger to the whaleboats. Often, when the sea is rough, the body of a whale must be abandoned because of the fear that its sheer weight might cause the schooner to sink. In such case, before abandoning the whale, a rope with a buoy attached is secured to it so that it can be found more easily. Despite this, it often happens that the whale is lost, either because the wind and waves carry it far away or because the rope breaks or is cut by scavengers of the sea.

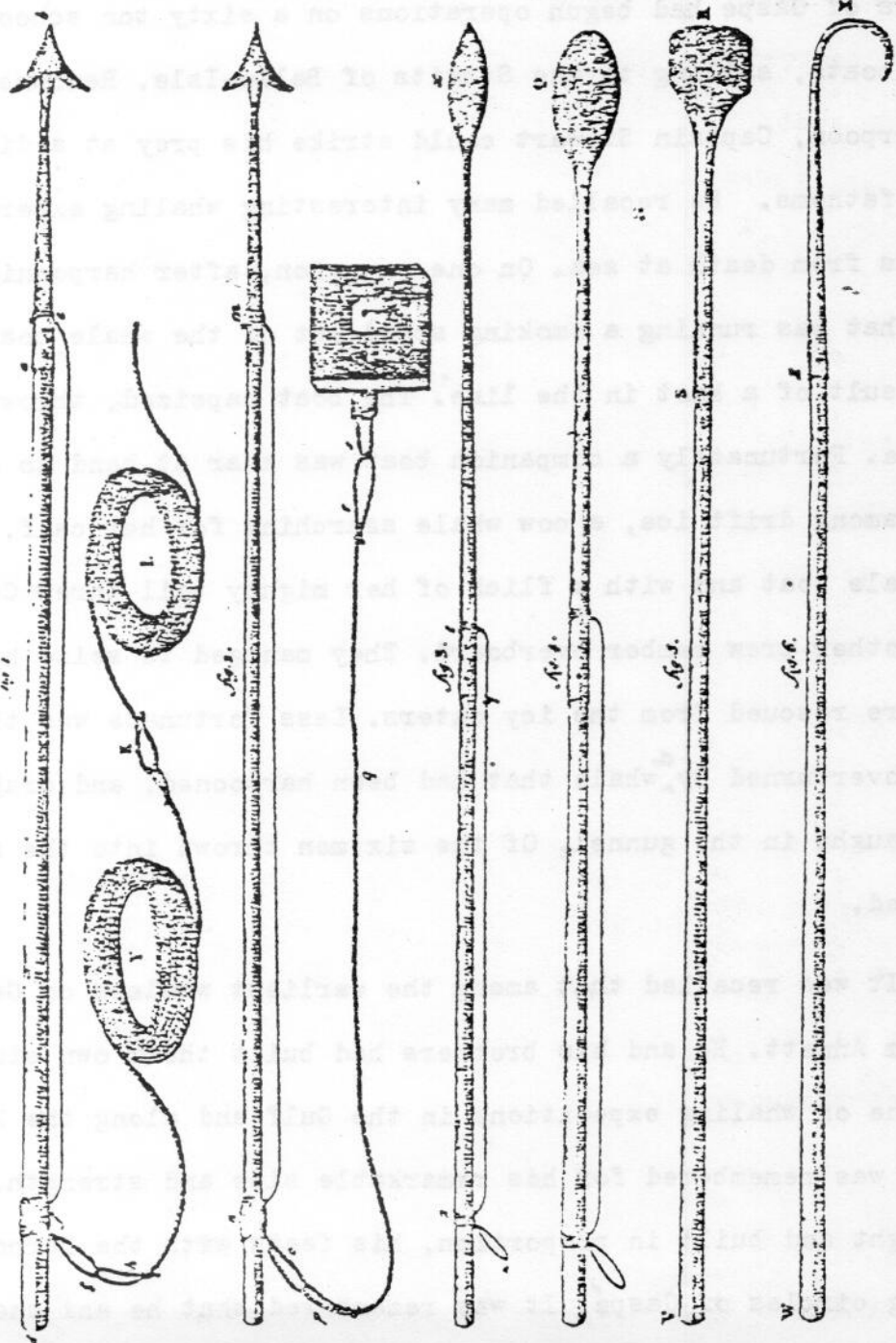
The ships used for whaling in the Gulf are large, well-built schooners, capable of riding out bad storms; for to profit at this occupation it is essential to remain at sea. On the sides of these schooners are suspended two whaleboats which are kept ready for launching at the moment the signal is given. The crew of each schooner is made up of some fifteen men who must be rugged sailors and excellent rowers; because often they must be at their oars for entire days. Previously they could approach whales by rowing but now the least noise alerts them; thus on approaching at some distance the oars are shipped and sweeps or paddles, which make less noise in the water are used.

The manner in which the crew is paid varies: some receive a fixed wage; others get a proportional share of the profits of the whaling voyage. Among the men of Captain Coffin's crew, two Micmac Indians of Gaspé Bay were pointed

Indians are excellent seamen; some schooners have their crews composed entirely of Micmacs and these crews are the equal of others.

The day following our visit Captain Stewart came into the harbour where the try-works is located to discharge his load. He brought to my attention a baby whale that had been found in the body of the whale killed and which had already attained a length of more than fourteen feet.

WHALING TOOLS - HARPOON - LANCE - GAFF.



THE GASPE WHALERS

In her interesting book, "TREASURE TROVE IN GASPE AND THE BAIE DES CHALEURS", the late Gaspesian author, Mrs. Margaret G. MacWhirter wrote of talks that she had with two of Gaspe's noted whalers, Captain Charles Stewart and Felix Annett. These conversations provided, in part, the following information on whaling lore and experiences:

Captain Stewart, acknowledged in his day to have been one of the best whalers of Gaspe had begun operations on a sixty ton schooner, carrying two whale boats, sailing to the Straits of Belle-Isle. Renowned as an expert with the harpoon, Captain Stewart could strike his prey at a distance of six or seven fathoms. He recalled many interesting whaling experiences and close escapes from death at sea. On one occasion, after harpooning a whale, the rope that was running a smoking speed out of the whale boat, became jammed as the result of a knot in the line. The boat capsized, throwing the crew into the sea. Fortunately a companion boat was near at hand to effect rescue. Once, among drift ice, a cow whale searching for her calf, passed under the whale boat and with a flick of her mighty tail threw Captain Stewart and another crew member overboard. They managed to seize hold of the line and were rescued from the icy waters. Less fortunate was the crew of a whale boat, overturned by a whale that had been harpooned, and dragged under when the line caught in the gunnel. Of the six men thrown into the sea, only one survived.

It was recalled that among the earliest whalers of Gaspé was Captain William Annett. He and his brothers had built their own sturdy schooner and had gone on whaling expeditions in the Gulf and along the North Shore. Captain Annett was remembered for his remarkable size and strength. Six feet, five inches in height and built in proportion, his feats with the harpoon were a legend in whaling circles of Gaspé. It was remembered that he and one of his brothers had carried a whale boat, loaded in readiness for sea, upon their shoulders to the water's edge for launching.

Felix Annett, also a noted harpooner in his day, recalled the time that his boat had killed three Greenland whales off Kamouraska. The distance through the great head of one of these whales was seventeen feet and the blubber was eighteen inches thick. Like Captain Stewart, Felix Annett could recall whaling adventures of high drama and narrow escapes. On one occasion off Labrador, after getting fast to a whale, the line jammed after a flip of the tail of the whale upset his boat. Another whale boat had arrived just in time to save the crew, none of whom could swim. Another incident that remained vividly in Felix Annett's memory was the time that his whale boat rested high and dry on the back of a cow whale that rose right under their craft while she was searching for her calf that the boat had harpooned. Keeping utterly quiet, Felix Annett and his men had waited with terrible anxiety for their fate. The unexpected happened: the huge creature settled slowly into the sea leaving the whale boat and its crew safe and unhurt. The only explanation was that the cow whale had mistaken the boat for her calf.

The typical whale boat used by the Gaspé whalers was described as being thirty feet long and manned by a crew of six men, four rowers, a steersman and a harpooner. The harpoon had attached firmly to it some three hundred fathoms of primewarp - a very strong and flexible manilla rope, one and seven-eighths inches in size. The lance used was made of iron with a steel blade and a handle of dog-wood. To it was attached ten fathoms of rope. When a whale was struck, and fled, the boat would fly through the water in a foaming run so that only the upper parts of the crew were visible as they rushed through the water at tremendous speed.

The major partners of the crew of a whaling schooner were usually paid by a share of the profits while other members received a fixed monthly wage. From an agreement entered into between Captain John Davis of the schooner "RAMBLER" of the Port of Gaspé and his crew, this arrangement is recorded:

NAME	WAGES PER MONTH	SHARE
FELIX ANNETT	-	ONE 16th.
ABNER COFFIN	-	ONE 18th.
WILLIAM PATTERSON	-	ONE 20th.
THOMAS PATTERSON	-	ONE 26th.
GEORGE COFFIN	-	ONE 28th.
JAMES W. COFFIN	-	ONE 28th.
CHARLES DAVIS	-	ONE 28th.
HUGH JERHE (?)	-	ONE 28th
LOUIS FITZBACK	18 dollars	-
JAMES ARGUMENT	18 dollars	-
J (?) Vjeletsdip(?)	14 dollars	-
Duncan McKenzie	13 dollars	-
Pierre Parant	8 dollars	-
Peter Jacques	8 dollars	-

The price of whale oil was subject to market fluctuations. At one time a barrel of oil (30 gallons) was worth £4 sterling while well-refined oil commanded an additional £2 sterling.

Captain Stewart and Felix Annett spoke to Mrs McWhirter of the three species of whale that they normally encountered. These were the SULPHUR BOTTOM, HUMPBACK and FINNER. The first was considered by whalers as the most valuable for its yield of oil - as much as one hundred barrels having been obtained from one kill. The SULPHUR BOTTOM whale grew to great size - occasionally over one hundred feet in length, twelve feet through and with a tail spread of twenty feet. The most common of the Gulf whales was the HUMPBACK. Whalers respected the FINNER as a killer whale. Its distinguishing feature was its enormous fin on its back, some five feet high. In length it might reach

seventy-five feet.

After the drama of the pursuit and final capture of a whale came the process of cutting up which normally took about six hours. At the try-works the blubber was melted down into oil and grease in huge cauldrons with a capacity of sixty to one hundred gallons.

As a postscript and personal note on Captain Charles Stewart and Felix Annett, that may be of interest to Gaspesians, the Diary of the Rev. George Milne, Rector of St. Andrew's Anglican Church, New Carlisle, has the following entry:

MAY 26, 1848. MARRIED CHARLES STEWART OF GASPE BASIN, CO. OF GASPE, MARINER, SON OF LATE JOHN OF COX, CO. OF BONAVENTURE, MARINER & MARY MC KINNON HIS WIFE, NOW WIFE OF SAMUEL CHRISTIE OF COX, FARMER, BACHELOR OF MAJOR AGE AND MARGARET MARIA STARNES OF COX, DAUGHTER OF PHILIP OF COX, FARMER AND MARY JANE SHERAR, WIFE, SPINSTER OF MAJOR AGE, BY LICENSE.

Felix Annett, the youngest son of Captain William Annett and his wife, Margaret Patterson was born in 1819 and died in 1869 at the comparatively early age of fifty years. Felix did not marry.

VALE - THE SALUTATION OF LEAVE TAKING

The era of the Gaspé whalers is now a memory - but one that is a unique part of the cultural heritage of Gaspesia. Time and tide have passed by the "wooden ships and iron men". The sails of departing and returning whaling schooners are no longer to be seen in Gaspé Bay.

The accounts of their exploits given above, while fragmentary, honour those early Gaspesian seamen, who, in the words of the pioneer Overseer of the Fisheries, were the equals of their American and British contemporary whalers "in skill, in hardihood, and in courage".