GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE EMIGRANT AND SPORTSMAN IN CANADA
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PART II
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KEN ANNETT

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FOREWORD

It was more than 100 years ago that the British author and visitor to Canada, John J.Rowan, published in London, England his interesting book, THE EMIGRANT AND SPORTSMAN IN CANADA. As this rare old volume has long been out of print, GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY has selected certain extracts that reflect the author's visit to and observations on the District of Gaspé. A previous article, No.232 in the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY series, was published privately in Volume 6.

The present article reflects two very different aspects of Gaspesian activity that were vitally important to our ancestors of the 1870' but now fading into oblivion. The first describes the commercial salmon fishery and manufacture for export from the estuary of the Restigouche River. The second recalls life in winter lumber camps that once provided employment and a unique winter life-style for many Gaspesians.

Other references to these topics were made in the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY articles No.17, THE STORIED PAST OF THE RESTIGOUCHE, (SPEC. Feb.7,1980.) and No.117, DOWN ON THE POINT. Lorna Clark Miller contributed a fine article - A HISTORY OF LUMBERING IN WAKEHAM to an early issue of SPEC.

RESTIGOUCHE SALMON FISHERY -1870's

The Indian name of the Bay of Chaleur is *Echeetan Nemachii,* or sea of fishes. There is probably no other expanse of water in the world of the same extent in which the finny tribes exist in such multitudes and in such variety. It is a favourite resort of the *Salmonidæ,* a species that delights in pure clean water, in rough and rapid rivers. This is essentially the nature of the rivers in this region, which flow through an uncultivated and rocky country, and in which the *Salmonidæ* find beds to deposit their spawn safe from molestation. Both salmon and trout are particularly large and fine. At the head of the bay, more especially at the Canadian side, salmon average 20 lbs. in weight. The fishery is a very important and lucrative business here; it commences on the 1st of June, and lasts for two months. During that short period I have known one fisherman take 20,000 lbs. weight of salmon, which at 6 cents would amount to $1200. It would be hard to estimate the total amount exported from the bay, but it must be very large. The greater part of it is manufactured in tins. One American firm puts up as much as 280,000 lbs. in a season. Lobsters are manufactured in the same way; they are worth about $1 per hundred here. Herring abound in countless shoals. Anyone not familiar with northern waters will suspect me of romancing when I say that I have seen 600 barrels taken in one sweep of a seine net. Often sufficient salt cannot be procured to save them, and they are used as manure. An American schooner struck a school of mackerel somewhere in the bay at 8 o'clock in the morning, and before midnight, fishing with hook and line, the crew had 100 barrels caught and cured. Fish are destroyed and wasted in the most reckless way, but the supply never fails. For a week in the spring of the year smelts run up the rivers in one unceasing stream. It is an astonishing sight to paddle down the Restigouche at this season and see the farmers "smelting"—scooping up the little fish in hand-nets. The amount they take is incredible, and most of the potatoes grown near the river spring from this fishy manure. Now that the railway is completed, fish of all kinds can be sent to market in ice, and the value of the fisheries is consequently much enhanced.

White porpoises (*Delphinus Leucus*) visit the bay in considerable numbers every summer. These huge monsters, measuring from 25 to 30 feet in length, go in shoals, probably in pursuit of the salmon, and may be seen from a great distance disporting themselves on the surface of the water. I am told that one of these fish will yield oil to the value of $100, yet no means of capturing them has yet been devised. I have mentioned a few of the

principal fishes, but all other varieties known in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are represented in proportionate numbers. Even in the depths of winter, fish can be procured in large quantities. At this season, at the mouth of Restigouche, dozens of Indian boys earn their livelihood by fishing through the ice with hook and line for sea trout, and spearing eels, tommy-cods, and smelts. The cod fishery in the bay is almost wholly in the hands of Jersey firms, who have been established on this coast for one hundred years. Their establishments at Paspediac, at Percé, and at Caraquette, are models of system and order. In the fishing season they employ thousands of men and boats, and ship the cured fish direct to Europe, the West Indies, and the Brazils.

Notwithstanding this wealth of fishes, the fishermen round the Bay of Chaleur are a very poor class. This is partly owing to the wretched truck system which still prevails. Instead of getting cash for their fish, they are always in debt to the merchant for supplies furnished in the winter and spring. Whilst the merchant makes out of the fisherman 50 per cent. on his goods, and 50 per cent. more on the fish he buys, he has also to take the risk of supplying goods for which he may never be paid. This trucking system is perhaps unavoidable in a new country where communications are difficult, settlers poor, and provisions scarce; but the necessity for this state of things exists no longer in the Bay of Chaleur, and probably the completion of the Intercolonial railroad will put an end to it.

Hitherto the salmon caught in the Bay of Chaleur has been put up in hermetically sealed tins for exportation. Several firms have been engaged at this business, some of them manufactured as much as 200,000 lbs. weight of salmon in the season. It is a pretty sight to see the fish coming in of a morning. Canoe after canoe discharges its load of silvery beauties fresh out of the nets. Sometimes in the early part of the season whole canoe loads will average 25 lbs. each, and I have seen fish here up to 56 lbs. in weight. As the fish come in, they are at once prepared, and pass through a good many hands before they are done up in the tins with which we are all familiar. The first man into whose hands the fish comes lays it on a bench and scrapes off the scales; the next opens and cleans it, washing it in a cistern provided for the purpose; the third cuts the fish into junks of the thickness of the length of the tin. All this is done in an outhouse or shed, but the pieces are now passed into the workshop, where they are further cut up, weighed, and packed into the tins by a succession of hands. Another man wipes the tins and passes them on to have the covers fitted on. In each of these covers a small hole is punched. The solderers next receive the cases, and seal them up carefully, including the hole in the cover. They are now packed in perforated

trays and passed out of the workshop through a trap-door to the boiling house, where they undergo a certain amount of boiling. The trays are then raised out of the boilers, and as each one comes out of the water, a tinsmith applies a hot iron to the soldered hole in the lid of the tin. The solder melts and the heated air fizzes out. The instant this air has escaped, a second tinsmith finally seals up the aperture. The cases are then doused in cold water and passed into the storeroom, where they are painted, labelled, and packed in boxes for exportation. But now that the Intercolonial railroad is completed, salmon will be too valuable to put up in tins; it will pay the fishermen much better to send them fresh to market. Hitherto the price of salmon in this country has been from 2*d.* to 3*d.* a pound. Fresh salmon is worth at least a shilling in the cities of Canada. There are two ways of sending salmon fresh to market. When the time taken in transition does not exceed two or three days, they are packed in boxes with broken ice, or better still with snow. Collecting and storing these packing materials is not a great labour in this country. Snow is considered the better of the two. It is collected in wooden sheds built with double walls and roofs, with a vacuum between the outer and inner one. As the snow is put in, it is tramped down, and in this state there is no trouble in preserving it all summer. The other way of sending fish to market has the advantage that by it fish may be kept perfectly fresh for almost any length of time, and can be held up like wheat until the market is high. The fish in this case are frozen solid. By the kindness of one of the owners of these great refrigerators, I was allowed to see the process. The fish when brought in are exposed to a temperature of about 30 degrees of frost. This intense cold is caused by packing a freezing mixture, the main ingredients of which are crushed ice and salt, into a chamber which surrounds the fish about to be frozen. Between 300 and 400 can be frozen at a time. A fish requires about an hour's time to freeze for each pound that it weighs. Not only are they frozen perfectly solid, but they are coated with ice. They are then removed to a storeroom in which the temperature is kept below freezing point. The vessels in which they are shipped are supplied with refrigerators, as are also the warehouses at the port of delivery. By this process a fresh salmon from the Bay of Chaleur can be put on the table at Chicago in perfect order a month after it has left its native element. As fresh fish by the treaty of Washington is allowed to go free to the United States, there ought to be a great deal of money made in the Canadian fisheries. Even in mid-winter, trout, tommy-cod, eels, and delicious smelts are taken in great abundance in the Bay of Chaleur, and at this season these fish can be sent frozen to the American market in perfect order, without resorting to any artificial process whatever.

WINTER LUMBERING OPERATIONS-1870's

BRITISH North America contains probably the largest and the most valuable forests in the world. Notwithstanding the enormous quantity of timber that is exported yearly and manufactured at home, notwithstanding the millions of trees annually used for fuel, and the yet greater numbers that are each year wantonly wasted and destroyed, the forests still seem to be perfectly inexhaustible. From the head of the Ottawa westward, the traveller can go for days, for weeks, or even for months, through the virgin forest. Each year, however, the lumberer has to push a little farther back. The value of the lumber annually exported is about $30,000,000. In preparing this for market thousands of men and horses are employed, at wages running from $10 per month per man, up to $30 for skilled hands, and $20 or $30 for a pair of horses, with food in all cases both for man and horse.

One has to push very far back indeed into the woods to get beyond the traces of the lumbermen. Like the other tree-chopping animal of the country, the beaver, he leaves his mark wherever he goes. He requires no railways nor turnpike roads. Wherever in the forest there is a stream with water in it enough to float a stick of timber, there will his tracks be found. He makes his home in the woods when first the snow falls, and remains there till the spring; then he goes down the rivers with the logs, and for a brief period the towns are inundated with these sailors of the forest. They work in gangs of from six or eight men up to twenty. They build log camps for themselves and for their horses, and make their own roads. Each camp has a main or "portage" road, leading to the nearest settlement or turnpike road, which is sometimes as much as 50, 60, or 100 miles distant. Along this road their provisions are "portaged." This alone gives work to one team when the gang is large and the distance great. Flour, pork, tea, and molasses form the staples of their diet. They breakfast before daybreak, dine about ten or eleven, have a "bite" at two or three, supper at six, and a "lunch" before they go to sleep—not bad living; and at any hour of the day or night that a stranger happens to visit them, on goes the kettle and frying-pan, and he is treated to the best they have got. Their hospitality is unbounded, sometimes embarrassing. Once or twice, when I have been travelling in the lumber woods, I have had occasion to call in at eight or ten camps in the course of the day, and at every one of them I have been compelled to stop for a dinner, a lunch, or bite. In

a camp of twenty men the division of labour is as follows: the "boss" (*Anglicè*, "skipper"); the cook, who has no sinecure; the teamster and the teamster's assistant, commonly called the "teamster's divil"—they look after the horses, and haul the logs from the stump to the river bank with their teams; five broad-axemen, who square the logs; the "head swamper," i. e. engineer and road-maker, and six assistants; and four "fallers" (of trees). Their wages vary from $10 to $30 a month, with food; the cook, teamster, and broad-axemen receiving the highest rates. These wages, when looked into, are not as high as they appear at first sight. Very often but a small amount of their winter's wages is paid in cash; the balance is taken out in goods, clothes, &c., from the shop or "store" of their employers. The horses are hard worked, and fed chiefly on oats, hay being difficult to carry; they do not last long in the lumber woods. The logs have often to be hauled a distance of 3 or 4 miles to the river or brook. The amount of flour and pork consumed in the lumber woods is prodigious. Five men in one month get through two barrels of flour and one of pork. Supposing no other kind of food, that is the minimum allowance; and experience has proved that these are the articles of food best suited to the climate. Lumberers look down upon moose and cariboo meat, and will not touch beaver or rabbit. As for tea, no working man in Canada ever thinks he has had a "square" meal without it.

The camps are generally situated in hardwood land, near a brook or river. They are built of spruce logs, well padded with moss, and roofed with cedar or pine splits. The hearth is in the centre of the camp, with a bench or "deacon seat" on each side of the fire. Back of this are the beds, made of fir boughs, constantly renewed. The stables or hovels are close to the camps, and are made in the same manner, but of course without the fireplace, and with a loft for hay overhead. Neither horses nor men ever suffer from cold in the lumber woods; there is no wind, and the deep snow banked up round the camps and hovels adds greatly to the warmth.

To move the great pine trees from the stump to the river, often a distance of some miles, strong heavy horses are required. In the lumber woods horses are bought and sold by the pound, like beef. This amuses an old-country man at first, but he will soon find that there is some sense in this arrangement. He will find that a horse which scales more than he is calculated to do from eye measurement is invariably a good one; whilst the one that weighs less than might be calculated from the size of his frame is invariably a bad one. The horse that weighs well always girths well, and *vice versâ*. The following is

a specimen of horsey conversation in the lumber woods:

First Lumber Boss (admiringly): "That's quite a horse of yours."

Second Lumber Boss: "Yas, he is con-siderable of a colt."

First Lumber Boss (interrogatively): "Guess he'll weigh twelve hundred?"

Second Lumber Boss: "Wal, if he don't weigh twelve hundred all out, I guess he'll pinch it up pretty snug."

Chorus of Lumber Bosses: "A bul-ly colt, yes, sir!"

A lumberers' race is a thing to be seen. It is not quite like an Ascot meeting, nor a grand military. It has a special identity of its own. Course, a hauling road some 4 feet wide in the forest, a 5-foot wall of snow on either side. The two horses starting for the race are ridden by their respective teamsters, who have "gambled" at least a month's wages on their favourites. The men of two camps assembled to witness the race, back their respective teamsters, and stand to lose or win various stakes, from a gallon of rum to a month's wages on the event. So far, though the course is a singular one, we have only the common features of all horse-racing. Now we come to the special peculiarity. The rival steeds, instead of standing neck and neck eager for the start, stand tail to tail in the narrow wood road; i. e. Tom, the favourite of "Salmon brook," looks towards the north, whilst Bob, the champion of "Trout crik," apathetically faces the south; and, stranger still, they are harnessed together with chain traces. One, two, three, and they are off! well, no, not quite off, but they are hanging on the traces. The forest rings with the whoops of the excited partisans, with the cracking of the teamsters' whips, and numerous quaint oaths and ejaculations. For a few exciting moments the horses tug and strain, when Bob, getting a good purchase in the well-beaten snow with his hind legs forges a length ahead, and the champion of "Salmon brook" goes stern foremost into the snow bank and is almost lost to sight. He of "Trout crik" is the heavier animal, bets are lost and paid, and no indignant British householder writes to the 'Times' to complain of the "demoralization" attendant upon horse-racing.

The "freshet-time" is the most critical period of the year to the lumberman. If the snow thaws very rapidly, and the freshet rises to an unusual height, his logs are scattered over the meadows and intervales, and collecting them is a great labour. Each log and stick of timber is marked with the private mark of the owner. They all float down the stream together, but are claimed and sorted out at the rafting grounds. Here booms are stretched across the river to collect the lumber, which is made into rafts, and either floated down by the stream or towed by steam tug down to the sea. The rivers in Canada have a lively appearance in the months of May and June; hardly

has the last of the ice disappeared when the logs commence to run. From daybreak in the morning until dark the stream drivers are at work, some in the water, some walking on the slippery floating logs as only a lumberman can, others paddling about in their canoes, pushing off their logs from the bank, guiding them through the broken water, and finally making them into rafts. This is a period of very hard and severe work for the men, who are highly paid, and of great anxiety to the lumberer. A sudden fall of water, an error in judgment in neglecting to seize the proper moment to launch his logs into the river, or a want of hands to help him, may be the means of leaving his logs high and dry on the shore, and of keeping him out of his hardly-earned money for a twelvemonth.

If a log could speak it would tell of many an hour's hard toil spent on it from the day it was first marked for cutting in the heart of the forest to the day it was shipped at Quebec. It would also bear testimony to the honesty of the Canadian people. The lumber is cast away in all sorts of strange places by the freshet, in meadows, in fields, in creeks, and gullies far from the banks of the river, where it lies sometimes for months unsought and unclaimed, but rarely if ever is a stick of timber stolen in Canada.

Only the square timber is exported, the logs are manufactured at home. A first-rate sawmill at work is one of the sights best worth seeing in Canada. The timber is drawn by machinery out of the water into one end of the mill, ripped up by the saws and passed out at the other end in planks or boards, or some other shape. Nothing is wasted but the sawdust. One saw takes off the slabs and squares the stick. Then the great gang-saw, that gives the idea of resistless power, slices up the square part into boards, while the circular saws whizzing round with immense velocity rip up the slabs into laths or some small sort of board. The sawmills at Ottawa are situated just at the foot of the falls of the Ottawa river, and even in the hottest weather the air is cooled by the spray of the waterfall. Unquestionably this is one of the finest "mill privileges" in the world. Many of these sawmills are very complete and well-managed establishments. Being frequently situated in remote and rather inaccessible places, they have to contain within themselves everything necessary to carry on the business. Stores of provisions, shops, accommodation for workmen, for tradesmen, for managers. Then besides the sawmill there is in all probability a great lumbering business to be looked after, and most likely the proprietor has a thousand men in the woods and a couple of hundred horses all employed in providing food for the devouring insatiable saws. It must take a good head to run a sawmill such as Mr. Gibson's on the Nashwaak in New Brunswick, or Mr. Price's on the Saguenay, where sea-going vessels lie alongside the mill and take in the deals direct from the saws.

chop the trees of the forest. And there is undoubtedly some irresistible charm in forest life, which, when a man has once tasted, leads him back to it winter after winter and year after year. Wages are good in the woods, and so is the living, and although the hours are long and the work hard, the ambition of the Canadian in the back settlements is to put in his winters in the lumber woods. None but good men are employed, and lumbering thus becomes a regular trade or handicraft, and is placed out of the reach of the immigrant, who can no more compete with the trained lumberman than he can with skilled workmen in any other trade with which he is unacquainted. But although immigrants cannot be recommended to go into the woods, they benefit indirectly from the lumbering; they can fill the places in the farmyards or elsewhere vacated by the lumbermen.

I do not know where a better exhibition of strength and skill and manly vigour can be seen than in the woods of Canada. The lumberers are the pick of a tall, strong, and hardy race of people. Their physique is admirable. It is a pleasure to watch two or four (as the case may be) of these fine fellows felling a pine tree. Their wedge-shaped axes at the end of 3-foot handles swung far back over their heads descend in perfect regularity one after the other, just on the spot to within one hair-breadth of where the blow is aimed. Rapidly fly the chips, and the great pine tree shivers to its very summit, and presently with a thundering crash falls on the very spot it was meant to fall.

The forests of Canada are the more valuable, on account of the scarcity of timber in the United States.