

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

ANGLICAN BICENTENNIAL

1793-1993

THE EARLY CHURCH IN GASPEZIA  
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A talk given to the Gaspé Deanery  
Bicentennial Family Gathering held  
at Loyalist Village, New Richmond,  
Qué. on August 7,1993.

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### THE EARLY CHURCH IN GASPEZIA

This year of 1993, marking the bicentennial of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec, reminds us of the long and significant history of the Anglican and other Protestant Churches in this District of Gaspé.

As a native Gaspesian, whose ancestors settled on the shores of Gaspé Bay more than 200 years ago, I am honoured to have this opportunity to recall something of the early church in Gaspesia as we meet here today at Loyalist Village. At the outset I must stress that my recall is subjective. Each of you in your particular parish and community along the Coast will be more aware than I am of local personalities, events and traditions related to your church. But the District of Gaspé is so vast and the span of time over two centuries is so great that my objective will be to provide a perspective to church establishment and development from a far distant past.

#### THE GASPEE EXPEDITION-1758.

While the bicentennial we observe this year dates from the arrival of Bishop Jacob Mountain at Quebec in 1793, it is important to recall that Protestants had been settling in the District of Gaspé for some thirty years prior to the establishment of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec. Indeed, we might note that, in all probability, military chaplains of the Church of England accompanied the British regiments of General James Wolfe's "Gaspee Expedition" to Gaspé Bay in the Fall of 1758 after the capture of the French fortress of Louisbourg. This force of four regiments and ancillary troops were conveyed to Gaspé by a squadron of some fifteen of His Majesty's Royal Navy

warships and transports. One may assume that traditional religious services were held on the ships and on the shores of Gaspé at that time. For the following year of 1759 we have the names of fourteen military chaplains attached to the "Quebec Expedition" of General Wolfe.

#### SETTLEMENT CENTERS

After the fall of New France to the British in the campaigns of 1758, 1759 and 1760 there were significant beginnings in the District of Gaspé for Protestant settlement. These included, in brief:

- \* The coincidental arrival in 1764 of Charles Robin of Jersey, Channel Islands and Felix O'Hara from the American Colony of New York. Robin, and the employees of the remarkable fishery empire he founded, established the fishing stations that grew in time to permanent Gaspesian communities. Felix O'Hara, the pioneer settler at Gaspé Basin, influenced Gaspesian life as merchant, land surveyor, customs agent, administrator and pioneer judge. He and his able sons touched the lives of early Gaspesians from Gaspé to Restigouche. Early Anglican churches were built on land donated by the Robin and O'Hara families respectively.
  
- \* To the coves of the Forillon at the entrance to Gaspé Bay came fishermen and merchants from the Island of Guernsey. They brought to Gaspesia their Wesleyan Methodist faith and their little chapel at St. George's Cove was one of the early churches in the District. These Guernsey settlements were within the limits of the Forillon National Park.
  
- \* To the shores of the Restigouche River estuary, with its great



resources of salmon and lumber, pioneer entrepreneurs such as Walker, Shoolbred, Smith and Lee brought sturdy Scotch settlers, the Adams, Duncans, Duthies, Mowats and others. Their first, early church, made of logs, was built at Miller's Point but moved later to the Athol site that remains today in the care of the Caledonian Society of the Restigouche

- \* Significant settlement followed the end of the American Revolutionary War with the arrival of dispossessed Loyalists and veteran soldiers. While the main settlement was at New Carlisle the newcomers took up lands at points along the Coast from Cross Point to Gaspé. With them new priority needs were evident for churches and schools.

#### BISHOP CHARLES INGLIS VISITS.

Within five years of the arrival in Gaspesia of the main group of Loyalists from Camp Machiche, near Three Rivers, the first Anglican Bishop of Canada, the Honourable and Right Reverend Charles Inglis came to Gaspe from his base in Halifax on a Royal Navy frigate, H.M.S. DIDO, Captain Charles Sandys, R.N., Master. The Bishop and Captain Sandys went ashore to visit with Felix O'Hara and subsequently O'Hara dined on board the frigate. These conversations briefed Bishop Inglis on the state and needs of the growing population of Gaspesia and the urgent need for resident Anglican clergy. As a prominent Loyalist who had suffered greatly at the hands of the American rebels, Bishop Inglis could appreciate the situation of the Gaspesian Loyalists. From Gaspé Bishop Inglis continued his visitation to Quebec City, Three Rivers, Sorel and Montreal. His findings and recommendations to London did much to advance the appointment of the Right Reverend Jacob Mountain as the Lord Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec in 1793.

HIATUS OF 25 YEARS

Between the appointment of Bishop Jacob Mountain to the Diocese of Quebec in 1793 and the arrival in Gaspesia of the first resident Anglican minister in 1819 a period of 25 years - a whole generation - existed. Beyond the Gaspesian shores great events were occurring - the French Revolution; The era of Napoleon; the naval victories of Nelson; the War of 1812-1814; the historic battle of Waterloo to recall but a few. And though Gaspesia had no Anglican clergy I think it appropriate to note four ministers of the Church of Scotland who served temporarily in the Gaspesia of that time and ministered without distinction to denomination.

\* REV.MATTHEW DRIPPS. Minister of the Church of Scotland who came to Atlantic Canada and there met, on shipboard, Captain Caldwell of New Carlisle - a son of the Loyalist Caldwell family. He came to New Carlisle at the invitation of Captain Caldwell in 1797 / 1798 and returned in 1800, bringing pastoral care to settlers in the region. He later served the Loyalist town of Shelburne, Nova Scotia.

\* REV.JOHN MITCHELL Sponsored by the London Missionary Society the Rev.John Mitchell came to Canada in 1800 and took up work at New Carlisle in November of that year. He was a regular visitor in the communities westward to Restigouche. At New Carlisle he met and married Janet Sherar, daughter of the Loyalist family of Thomas and Jean Melvin Sherar.

\* REV. EDWARD PIDGEON. Of Huguenot descent and having received his theological training in Scotland, Rev. Edward Pidgeon served the New Carlisle area in 1798. He returned to Britain but came out again to the Coast under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. From 1805 he served in Prince Edward Island where he married Mary Montgomery, a sister of Christianna, wife of William Cuthbert of New Richmond. Distinguished descendants, linked with New Richmond, include The Rev. Dr. George Campbell Pidgeon and the Rev. Dr. Edward "Leslie" Pidgeon.

\* REV. JOHN YOUNG. A native of Beith, Scotland, and graduate of Glasgow University, Rev. John Young served in New York, Albany, Schenectady and Montreal before moving to the Athol parish of the Restigouche circa 1808. His pastoral work extended down the Gaspé Coast to communities eastward of New Carlisle. His REGISTER for 1811-1812 of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials beginning with the burial at New Richmond of Eunice, wife of Capt. Azariah Pritchard, Sr., is a document of historic value.

It is quite possible that other Protestant Clergy ministered to Gaspesians in the first two decades of the 19th century. It is hoped that any such work will be identified, researched and recorded. In particular, records of baptism, marriage and burial would be a "find" of great significance.



1813 LETTER OF HENRY JOHNSTON.

In January, 1813 Henry B. Johnson of Douglastown and Point St. Peter and son-in-law of Daniel McPherson, a competitor of Charles Robin in the Gaspesian fishery, wrote a remarkable letter to Bishop Jacob Mountain of Quebec. Noting that he had lived in the Gaspé area for twenty years, during which time the population of British born and their descendants had increased to 1000, he proceeded, "to crave your Lordship's attention to the degraded state of the Protestants as such". He stated that, with the exception of a few parents, none of the members of Protestant families in the Gaspé Bay area, "had ever looked a regular Protestant Clergyman in the face." He cited grave problems of this prolonged lack of resident clergy with regard to Baptism, Marriage and Burial. His letter, preserved in the Archives of the Diocese of Quebec, made a dramatic but sincere plea for the appointment of resident clergy and pastoral care. However, it would be another six years before action was taken to meet the need so eloquently stated by Henry Johnston.

ACTION IN 1819

When Bishop Jacob Mountain visited England in 1819 the SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL offered him the services of the Rev. John Suddard as a missionary for the Quebec Diocese. The offer was gladly accepted and the Rev. Suddard, accompanied by his wife, children and two brothers reached Quebec City in September. The Bishop appointed him to the District of Gaspé. His parish extended from his base at Gaspé along the Bay Chaleur to Restigouche and across to the New Brunswick shore of the Bay. However, in 1820, the Rev. Richard Knagg was assigned to the New Carlisle/Paspebiac area. A start was made to provide church buildings at Gaspé Basin,

Malbay, Percé and New Carlisle / Paspebiac. It is of interest to note that the HISTORY OF ST.ANDREW'S CHURCH (New Carlisle) by Eleanor Blois Hall recalls local tradition that a log cabin on the "COMMON", near the Bay, had served as the first church and that the original graveyard was nearby. The site of the present church dates from 1824. At Gaspé the first church building was destroyed by a forest fire in 1821 but immediately replaced. The original Anglican church at Percé was <sup>on</sup> Cap Canon, near the Rock, with a small enclosure that served as a cemetery. It served the "Protestant Episcopal inhabitants of Percé" until 1862.

Neither the Rev.John Suddard nor the Rev.Richard Knagg remained at their respective Gaspesian posts for long. The work they began would be carried forward by others.

#### ARCHDEACON GEORGE JEHOSHAPHAT MOUNTAIN VISITS IN 1824.

In 1824 Bishop Jacob Mountain sent his son, Archdeacon George Jehoshaphat Mountain, to visit the District of Gaspé. He sailed from Quebec in the schooner, TWO BROTHERS, reaching Gaspé Bay in late August. As Archdeacon Mountain was a keen observer and kept a daily JOURNAL of his experiences and impressions those parts of his JOURNAL that have survived provide a fascinating glimpse of Gaspesia across the time gap of some 170 years ago.

Landing at St.George's Cove with its Wesleyan Chapel, he was welcomed by the Guernseymen of the Forillon who asked him to conduct service and preach to them in their native French. He then proceeded up the bay to Gaspé Basin to meet the Rev.John Suddard and take services in the second church in that community. From Gaspé he set out with Rev.Suddard to visit the churches at Malbay, Percé, New Carlisle and Paspebiac. Travelling along the Bay Chaleur in



an open boat he visited New Richmond, stayed over with the Stewart family at the Manor House of the Shoolbred Seigniory and with the Mann family at Cross Point and took services at the Athol Church. Then with two Micmac Indian guides he set out to traverse the wilderness of the Matapedia Valley to the Metis Seigniory on the St. Lawrence. From Metis he returned to Quebec by sea and land stages. Weeks of difficult travel gave the Archdeacon insight into the isolation of Gaspesia and the needs of its scattered communities for spiritual care.

#### THE SITUATION IN 1826

The situation of the Anglicans had so deteriorated by 1826 with the resignation of the Rev. John Suddard and the departure of the Rev. Richard Knagg that Archdeacon Mountain made a second visit to the Coast. After a "difficult meeting" at Gaspé with the Rev. Suddard he set out again in an open boat to visit the Gaspesian churches. His JOURNAL recounts his impressions of scenes, events and personalities at Douglstown, Point St. Peter, Malbay, Corner-of-the-Beach, Percé and L'Anse-au-Beaufils. Unfortunately sections of the JOURNAL for visits along Bay Chaleur westward from the Percé area are missing. It is known that the Archdeacon travelled by ship to Paspébiac, that he found the church building at New Carlisle under construction and that he continued his visit on to Restigouche. His report stated:

"...The great body of them (Anglicans of Gaspesia) could be easily kept fast in their attachment to the Church, if she could afford them some regular care and attention. It is a defect in our system that we have no workmen of a humbler class whose services might be disposable for purposes like these, and that people living scattered in new and small settlements must go without religious ordinances,

if they adhere to the Church. We ought to have deacons, as a distinct Order, and persons ought to be admitted to it for particular objects, whose pretensions are not such as to allow their looking higher."

This time Archdeacon Mountain returned to Quebec on the same Government vessel that had brought him to Gaspé Bay some weeks earlier. It would be eleven years before he visited the Coast again.

#### DEACONS AND CATECHISTS

The contribution of deacons and catechists to the early Church in Gaspesia has not been well researched and documented. Following the above suggestion of Archdeacon Mountain two deacons, George Salmon and William Arnold came to work in the New Carlisle/Paspebiac area in the Fall of 1826. The Gaspé Bay communities were served by the catechists Charles Davis and John Eden. In the L'Anse-au-Beaufils/Percé area Joseph Stowe Tuzo was active and effective as a lay reader. With the appointment of the Rev. Lucius Doolittle to the parish of Chaleur Bay in 1828 and the ordination and appointment of the Rev. William Arnold to the Gaspé/Percé parish in 1829 the situation began to improve from that found by Archdeacon Mountain in 1826.

#### LONG AND DEVOTED SERVICE

As it was the devoted service of clergymen that enabled the Anglican Church to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of early Gaspesians I propose, at the risk of invidiousness, to recall briefly the careers of four such reverend gentlemen. They were-

- \* Rev. William Arnold who served for 30 years from 1827 to 1857.
- \* Rev. George Milne who served for 32 years from 1841 to 1873.
- \* Rev. William Lyster who served for 44 years from 1858 to 1902.
- \* Rev. Felix Boyle, a native Gaspesian, who served in the Diocese of Quebec for 57 years from 1851 to 1908.

REV. WILLIAM ARNOLD

Born in 1804 near Dublin, Ireland, he came to Canada as a youth. He studied theology with the noted John Wilson of Kingston and came to the New Carlisle / Paspébiac area as a Deacon. Upon his ordination in 1828 he was appointed to the Gaspé / Percé area. At Gaspé he met and married Maria Charlotte O'Hara. Their home, "SPRING GROVE", near Arnold's Point, site of the present Gaspé Museum welcomed visitors to Gaspé in early times. As a missionary priest the Rev. Arnold travelled to communities of Gaspé Bay and the Percé area in an age when roads and bridges were virtually unknown. From 1837 to 1840 he served in parishes beyond Gaspesia but returned to Gaspé following the death of his wife in 1840. Subsequently he married Ellen Boyle of the Southwest Arm of Gaspé Bay and their daughter, Mrs. Edith Mills, has left a remarkable account of her father's life and service. Rev. Arnold was widely known to Gaspesians of his time and his fine records are an invaluable source of information for family historians.

REV. GEORGE MILNE

A native of Aberdeen, Scotland, as was his wife, Isabella Smith Milne. He was appointed to the Mission of the Bay of Chaleur by the Bishop of Quebec in 1841 and took up residence at New Carlisle. From 1856 onwards he was, in addition, the Rural Dean of the District of Gaspé. The life and work of the Rev. Milne touched the lives of more than one generation of Gaspesians from Gaspé to Restigouche as throughout his long years of service he made repeated journeys, under difficult conditions, throughout the district. Day by day and year after year he kept a remarkably detailed JOURNAL of his daily duties and the many Gaspesians he met and served. In those JOURNALS that have survived and in his register of marriage licenses issued for the



entire Gaspé District exists a fascinating and historic record of events and personalities of the Coast in his time.

Rev. Milne died in 1881 aged 82 years. A tombstone in the St. Andrew's Anglican Church Cemetery, near the entrance to the church, bears an inscription to him and his wife.

REV. WILLIAM GORE LYSTER.

Born Dublin, Ireland in 1831 into a very good family, he had the choice of a career in the Royal Navy or in Medicine. However, he chose the Church and was ordained in 1856. Coming to Canada as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel he was appointed by the Bishop of Quebec to the Parish of Port Daniel. In 1863 he moved to the Cape Cove Parish where he served until his death in 1902. In addition to his parish duties he was the Inspector of the Protestant Schools of Gaspé and Bonaventure Counties for 25 years from 1873 to 1898. Upon his death at the home of his friend Dr. William Wakeham of Gaspé his career was recalled, in part by these words - "...Mr. Lyster was a man of versatile genius and

considerable attainments; a brilliant scholar; well-read in English Literature and every department of Belles-Lettres, as well as in the literature of his profession. He was also well known in scientific circles for his attainments in natural science, in geology, astronomy, botany, electricity and other branches of science. He was a delightful companion - a brilliant conversationalist, a lucid writer and highly distinguished in the art of letter writing.

He was modest, quiet, never given to push his own way, lived for his people and was everything to them; friend, teacher, preacher, adviser, example, to whom

they all went in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity. When he died men and women said to one another - 'we will never see his like again...'

REV. FELIX J. BOYLE

Born 1823, son of James and Charlotte McKinnon Boyle of the Southwest Arm of Gaspé Bay, he was of the second generation of the widely known Boyle family. An early graduate of Bishop's College, Lennoxville, with a Master of Arts degree, he was ordained by Bishop George J. Mountain of Quebec in 1852 and appointed as the first resident Anglican minister in the Magdalen Islands, then owned by Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin. He participated in the building of the first church in the Islands at Grosse Isle and others at Amherst and Grindstone. He suffered great loss in the tragic death of his wife, Julia, daughter of the Rev. William Arnold, and their daughter and was transferred to the Frampton area south of Quebec City where he served for some thirty years. Upon his death in 1908 he was buried in the St. Malachie Anglican Church cemetery. The publication, CHRIST CHURCH IN FRAMPTON - AN ANGLICAN HERITAGE, features on its cover, in colour, an illustration of the triple stained glass window of the choir dedicated to the Rev. Felix Boyle. In the text of the booklet one reads - "...Reverend Boyle usually visited the surrounding missions on foot. Along the way he gladly dispensed medical care and advice to anyone in need...his generosity and good-humoured nature made him one of the most well-loved persons at the time..."

### PROPOSED PROJECTS

It has not been possible on this occasion to do more than dip here and there into the long and interesting story of the Anglican Church in Gaspesia. It is my hope that this year of Diocesan Bicentennial might prompt Gaspesian parishes, without written record of their history, to take steps to prepare one. At this time when our college and university students seek urgently for summer employment, consideration might be given by parish councils to have supervised projects of research and writing of parish history. Sources of information range from registers and minute books held in the various parishes to the Diocesan Archives at Bishop's University, the Church House Records in Quebec City and the rich store of historical material in our Quebec Provincial Archives.

### FAITH

At hand as I conclude this recall of the early church in Gaspesia is <sup>the</sup> Book of Common Prayer of my great-great grandfather, William Annett of Peninsula, Gaspé Bay, ship-builder, ship captain and whaler. Through all his life William knew of no minister of his Anglican faith in Gaspé. In 1806, when he was 27 years of age he and his brother, George, sailed their schooner to Quebec with a cargo of whale-oil and, while in port, went to the newly built Holy Trinity Cathedral (1804) for adult baptism by the Rev. Mountain. There was still no clergyman in Gaspé when William died and he was likely laid to rest with a reading from the Book of Prayer before me. The early Gaspesian Church reflected such Faith.