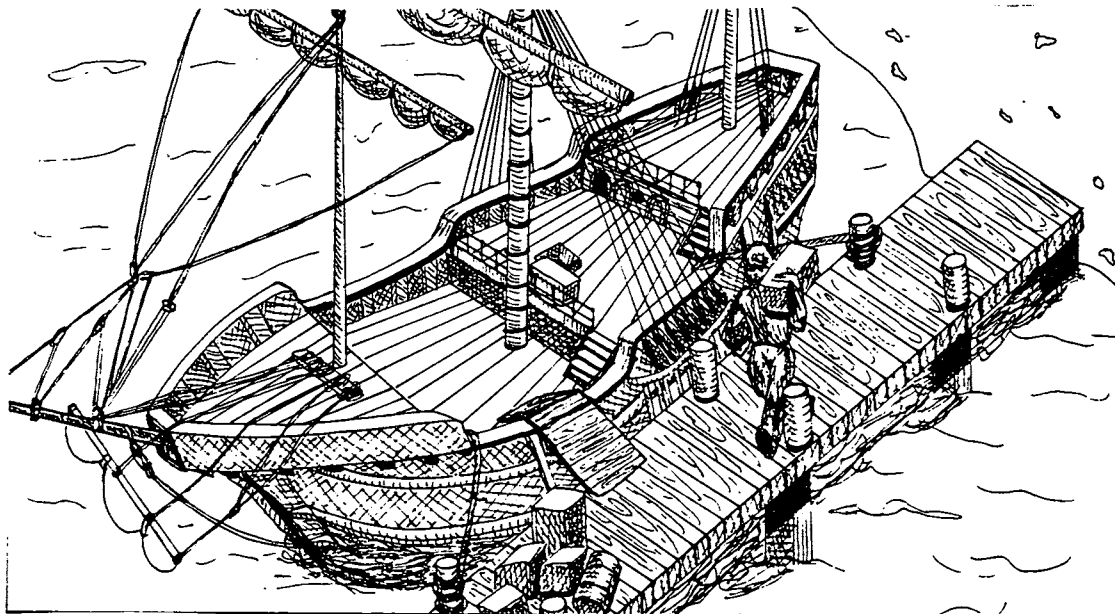


GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

A SEQUENT ACADIAN SETTLEMENT

From Rustico, P.E.I. to Saint Alexis



A SEQUENT ACADIAN SETTLEMENT

Previous articles of the "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" series have recalled Acadian settlement in Gaspesia. No.17, THE STORIED PAST OF THE RESTIGOUCHE (SPEC 07-02-80) described the military and privateering base near the present community of Cross Point circa 1750 and the Acadian village of some 1500 refugee inhabitants at Pointe-à-la-Garde. As a result of naval and military action by the British in 1760 a number of these Acadian families moved along the Bay Chaleur coast to settle at Carleton and Bonaventure. Some details of Bonaventure settlement was given in Article No.55, BONAVENTURE (SPEC 20-01-82) No.90, "TROIS MILLE CLOUS", recalled the life and influence of Father Charles Francois Painchaud, remarkable missionary priest of Carleton who served the far-flung Bay Chaleur Mission. The long and persistent struggle of the Acadian settlers to obtain land titles was explored in No. 133, LOUIS BOURDAGES (1764-1835). A unique glimpse of the Beach and Bar of early Bonaventure was given in Article No.169, ROUSSEAU AT BONAVENTURE. (SPEC 30-09-86) In the above and various other references throughout the series the Acadian contribution to the Gaspesian heritage is acknowledged.

THE 19th CENTURY COLONY.

It is perhaps not as well known in Gaspesia that 100 years after the original Acadian migration to the Restigouche a new movement of families from the Rustico area of Prince Edward Island to lands at the confluence of the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers founded the community of Saint Alexis de Matapedia.

In 1859, at the request of the Bishop of Charlottetown, Mgr. Bernard Donald McDonald to the Bishop of Quebec, a Quebec priest, Father George Antoine Belcourt was sent to Prince Edward Island's parish of Rustico and Hope River. Father Belcourt not only had good Quebec connections but he enjoyed the friendship and support of the Parisian historian, M. Rameau de Saint-Père who had ready access to the ruling Emperor of France, Napoleon III.(1808-1873)

Upon his arrival in Rustico Father Belcourt quickly came to the conclusion that the only solution to the poverty of his Acadian parishoners lay in a move from P.E.I. to new lands. To that end he

first travelled back to Quebec where, with the help of Bishop Cazeau, John Meagher, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Bonaventure County, and the Hon.U.J.Tessier he obtained a large land grant in Matapedia Township at the junction of the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers. On this land he proposed to establish a colony of Rustico Acadians.

EXPLORATION AND FIRST MIGRATION.

In July,1860 some twelve men of Rustico went to the Matapedia Valley to explore the lands proposed for the establishment of a colony. Then, in October, four families of some 27 members in all left Rustico, on a schooner fittingly named the "RUSTICO", for the Gaspé Peninsula to found the parish of Saint Alexis de Matapedia. They were followed in 1861 by 25 more families and 17 single persons. Other families followed in subsequent years up until 1865. A subscription campaign in Quebec raised a modest amount to provide the colonists with seeds and implements. More controversial, especially among English citizens, was the financial help given by the French Emperor, Napoleon III, on the intercession of M. Rameau de Saint-Père , friend of Father Belcourt. Writing of the reaction of Prince Edward Islanders to this aid from France, Father Belcourt noted:

"...Il semblerait que les Anglais de l'Ile ne voyaient pas d'un bon oeil ces dons que la France faisait aux Acadiens de Rustico..."

THE COLONY GROWS

In the Spring of 1862 Father Belcourt chartered a schooner to transport another group of Acadians from Rustico to the Matapedia colony. They sailed the first week in May with "tous leurs effects" including horses, agricultural implements and seed grain. Upon arrival they were welcomed by the Restigouche missionary, Père Saucier, who reported:

"...Je viens de recevoir 54 personnes de Rustico, elles forment 10 familles. Je recois en même temps 375 boisseaux patates, 94 d'avoine, 12 d'orges, et 5 lbs graines de navets.

" Etat total des immigrants arrivés de Rustico, d'après les documents ci-inclus-	
de l'automne 1860 à la fin d'avril 1861.....	44
em mai 1861.....	123
en juin 1861 à la fin de 1861, environ.....	25
en juin 1862.....	54
TOTAL (jusqu'à juin 1862	246

PROGRESS REPORTS

The autumn harvest of 1862 at Saint Alexis was good according to a letter of Father Belcourt to Rameau de Saint-Père of Paris in October of that year. Four miles of road had been built, the church building was framed and covered in and steps were in progress to find a blacksmith and a miller. Until a flour mill was bought in 1864 the grain had to be transported more than a dozen miles to be ground. The cost of the flour mill, the great sum for those times of \$450., was met in part by the Montreal Colonization Society and the balance with funds received from the French Emperor. The colonists were looking forward to the time when they could afford to have their own resident priest.

DECLARATION OF A COLONIST

The experience of many a Rustico colonist is reflected in the following letter of Joseph Dorion -

St-Alexis de Matapédia
16 janvier 1896

Je soussigné, originaire de l'Ile du Prince Edouard, ai choisi un lot de terre au sixième rang Ristigouche de St-François d'Assise, canton Matapédia, il y a six ans et demi. Sur ce lot il y avait un arpent d'abbatis. Je n'avais rien et je devais cinquante piastres. Alors j'étais âgé de vingt-quatre ans et non marié.

L'automne dernier j'ai récolté environ treize tonnes de foin, soixante-cinq minots d'orge, cinq minots de pois, trois cent dix-huit minots de patates, deux cent quarante minots de navets. A la boucherie j'ai envoyé douze cents livres de lard, trois porcs sont maintenant à l'engrais et j'en garde deux autres pour la

reproduction. J'ai un cheval, une vache, deux boeufs, une génisse, deux moutons; j'ai aussi herse, charrue, râteau à cheval, charette, voiture d'hiver, et je n'ai pas de dettes. J'ai environ vingt acres de terre propre à la culture, quatre acres sont débarassés de souches. Enfin je suis maintenant marié et le bon Dieu m'a donné deux enfants. Le dernier a été baptisé aujourd'hui.

Je fais cette déclaration en présence de M. le curé de St. Alexis.

Joseph Doiron
J.E. Pelletier, Ptre. 26

