

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE HYMANS OF GASPE

Recalling the account of the
historian, E.C.Woodley and a
study by Roch Samson for Parks
Canada on the influential and
respected Hyman family of Gaspé.

Ken Annett

THE HYMANS OF GASPEFOREWORD

Upon reflection, the number of Gaspé's English families that were active and influential in the community in the earlier decades of the century and have now disappeared from the scene is remarkable. The families of Davis, Richmond, MacKenzie, Jopling, Lindsay, Baker, Carter, Valpy, to mention but a few, are no longer present and represented in business and social life. Among such families is that of Hyman. Some Gaspésians will recall the Hyman store in Gaspé Harbour and Mr. Percy Hyman, the last of his family to control and manage a regional business that ceased operations as late as 1967 after operating in the Gaspé District for 123 years.

In recall of the influential Hyman family, GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY presents the following account by the late E.C. Woodley, an Officer of the Quebec Department of Education, historian and gifted author of a number of books on Quebec themes.

Attention will also be drawn to the more recent book, FISHERMEN AND MERCHANTS IN 19th CENTURY GASPE -The FISHERMEN-DEALERS OF WILLIAM HYMAN AND SONS, by Roch Samson. The 1986 revised edition, published by Parks Canada, is available from authorized bookstore agents or from the Canadian Government Publishing Centre. It is of interest to note that the cover of this book reproduces a rare picture of Gaspé Basin in 1868, oil on canvas, 16X26 inches by Jersey Artist Philip John Oules (1817-85) (J.H. Appleby Collection, Jersey.)

THE HYMANS OF GASPEBYE.C.Woodley

Our story begins in a village somewhere in Russia in the early part of the last century. A Jewish family consisting of an aged couple with their son, his wife and their family determined to seek a freer and, as they hoped, a happier life beyond the reach of Czarist oppression. In patriarchal fashion, as did Abraham of old, the little company travelled westward into Poland, seeking a new abiding place. The Hymans found it in the town of Lodz, about eighty miles southwest of Warsaw. It proved an unhappy choice, however, for they soon discovered that they had only passed from one form of oppression to another and even worse one, for soon after their arrival a progrom occurred in which both the old people perished.

Their son William, with his young wife, however, managed to escape from the disaster that had overtaken the family and after devious wanderings succeeded in reaching England in 1835, where they found refuge in Norwich. What had led them to this ancient city in Norfolk we do not know, unless it was the presence of a small Jewish community there.

Living in Norwich at this time was a jeweller named Hart, who had developed a successful business. With him young William Hyman found employment and soon proved his worth. About 1840 William Hyman was sent to New York to represent the Hart interests.

Like so many others before and since, young Hyman came under the spell of the new lands, untrammelled by the limitations of the world which he had left. In 1841 he made a journey to Montreal and Quebec which was destined to determine his future. While prosecuting his business he happened to meet a group of fishermen from the Gaspé Peninsula who had come to obtain supplies for their trade. In conversation with them he learned of the Micmac Indians on the Peninsula who desired to exchange their furs for goods. The business possibilities of the situation were at once evident to William Hyman and he decided to go to Gaspé to investigate. He had not been there long, however, before he realized that a more profitable undertaking would be the establishment of a business which would enable the fishermen to market their catches, receiving credit in return which

would be used at the Company store.

This type of business had been in operation in Gaspé since the beginning of the British Regime when Charles Robin of Jersey organized a company under the designation of the Charles Robin Company. Other firms also like the LeBoutilliers and William Fruing had acted as middlemen for the fishermen. All these firms, however, operated from centers along the south shore of the Peninsula. William Hyman entered new territory, for he decided to open business near a cove at the extreme end of the Peninsula, near where Gaspé Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence meet, only a few miles from Ship Head, the 700 foot cape against which the Atlantic lashes in fury much of the year.

Just above this cove, with its pebbly beach known as Grande Greve. William Hyman built a substantial house and store which were the heart of ever expanding business enterprises for the next thirty years.

Those were years of bold adventure, with many hardships, met with indomitable courage. After four years of pioneer work the whole establishment was burned and operations had to begin again, without the benefit of insurance. But a new home and store soon rose on the ruins of the old ones and are still in use after one hundred and twenty three years. Meanwhile William Hyman had won his way into the hearts of the Gaspé fishermen and had gained a reputation for integrity and honesty which made his firm a symbol of honesty and fair dealing. As he advanced in years, the direction of affairs gradually passed into the hands of his son Isaac.

ISAAC HYMAN

Isaac Hyman was a remarkable man. While showing great initiative, he carried on the traditions established by his father, both in business and in the community. He spent most of his life at Grande Greve, in the old home and for forty years was Mayor of the municipality, most of whose inhabitants were French and Roman Catholic.

The business had by this time expanded to other places and an important branch had been formed at Fox River. This was in charge for fifty years by Horatio Hyman, Isaac's brother.

The monotony of Isaac Hyman's life at Grande Greve was broken by business trips abroad. While in London, England, during one of these trips he met the lady who later became his wife. She was Charlotte Cohen,

the daughter of a wealthy Jewish manufacturer. One wonders at the assurance of Isaac Hyman, who knew so well the nature of life in a remote corner of the Gaspé Peninsula, in asking a lady accustomed to the social life and luxury of London to share his lot with him. But it was another instance of the perennial wonder of a deep love, which thrives on hardship instead of being discouraged or depressed by it. When Isaac Hyman's Bride arrived from London she brought with her, among other things, twenty-seven trunks of silk gowns and finery. One wonders what happened to this wealth of material, for there was little occasion for its destined use at Grande Greve.

CHARLOTTE Mrs Isaac Hyman proved to be a worthy helpmate for her
COHEN husband, entering with interest and understanding into
HYMAN his work and the life of the community in which her lot
 had been so strangely cast. From time to time she made
 trips to England, but Grand Greve was her home. Some of her nine
 children were born in England, but most of them first saw the light
 of day in the home on the rugged Gaspé Coast. She lived almost to
 the age of ninety and lies buried in the quiet Jewish cemetery on
 the slopes of Mount Royal in the Hyman family plot.

HYMAN Naturally, adventures of one kind or another, often
JOURNAL perilous, entered into the life of a man who spent
 his days in a community that depended largely on the
 harvest gathered at all times from the sea. The sea may be generous
 in its gifts but it is a hard master, and many times the fishermen in
 their small boats, tempting the wild Atlantic just too far, never
 returned again to their homes. The Atlantic off the coast of the Gaspe
 Peninsula can be very rough, for nothing but a waste of waters lies
 between that coast and Brittany, nearly three thousand miles distant.
 In a Journal which Isaac Hyman kept for most of his life are some
 entries which, with his letters, give glimpses of high adventure on
 sea and land.

PERCY On Isaac's retirement, the management of the extensive
HYMAN trading company passed to his son, Percy. The company
 functioned through six branches in addition to its head-
 quarters at Gaspé Harbour, set up by Percy Hyman in 1914. The branches
 were located at Grande Greve, Cap des Rosiers, Fox River, St. Maurice
 de l'Echourie, Cloridorme and Grande Vallée.

During the 123 years of its existence the firm shipped dried cod in large quantities to Italy, the West Indies, Brazil, the Argentine and the United States. The war (W.W.II) occasioned some changes in the business as fish were then shipped frozen rather than salted and dried.

The firm ceased operating in 1967 after being in business for 123 years



PERCIVAL GERALD HYMAN

OBITUARY

HYMAN, Mabel Isabella (nee Reynolds)

At the Montreal General Hospital on February 7, 1991, Beloved wife of the late Percival Gerald Hyman, dear mother of Phyllis (Mrs. Bruce C. Townley), Percival Gerald (Bud) (Anne Matthew), Barbara (Mrs. William J. Maclaren), Major David George Hyman (Helgard Opitz) loving grandmother of Heather (Mrs. John Pepper), Jennifer, Catherine, Andrea, Daphne, Judith, William, Lisa and Sophie... Funeral service on Monday, February 11 at 2 p.m.

FISHERMEN AND MERCHANTS
IN 19th CENTURY GASPE

The Fishermen-Dealers
of William Hyman and
Sons

Roch Samson

The creation of the Forillon National Park prompted a number of studies on the physical features and history of the area of which the above volume by Roch Samson is one. As the author notes in his ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS "This study was made possible by Percival Gerald Hyman who bequeathed to Parks Canada the William Hyman and Sons Company archives, and by David Hyman, Percival's son, who allowed us access to the company's correspondence..." The back cover of the revised edition of 1986 has the notation, "Anglo-Norman capital from Jersey and Guernsey controlled the Gaspé fishery in the 19th century. Most of this capital was used to produce dried cod for Mediterranean markets. William Hyman's company in Grande-Grave provides a model of relations between merchants and fishermen for 150 years in Gaspé. This study illustrates how Gaspé society was shaped by the way it organized the production of dried cod."

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The above study, together with that of David Lee, THE ROBINS IN GASPE. 1766 TO 1825, published in 1984 provide most valuable and interesting insight into the Gaspesian cod fishery so vital to past generations.