

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

DANIEL FRASER OF MATAPEDIA

Harper's New Monthly Magazine of 1863
described this remarkable 'laird' of
Matapedia as 'monarch of no small realm'

KEN ANNETT



DANIEL FRASER OF MATAPEDIA

Ever since reference to the "thriving Fraser establishment" at Matapedia was made in the article of this series, "THE KEMPT ROAD", (SPEC of Nov.11,1980) it has been the hope to deal in more detail with the remarkable story of the Matapedia pioneer, Daniel Fraser. That this is now possible to the degree reflected in the account below is due to the kind collaboration of a number of persons, including the following:

- . Mr. Jackson B. Ross of Campbellton, N.B., who supplied invaluable information from census and church records, cemetery lists, regional histories, interviews with local genealogists and a detailed history of the Restigouche Salmon Club for the century of 1880 to 1980.
- . Mrs. Melita Hume of Melbourne, Qc., a descendant of Daniel Fraser who has in her possession Fraser family documents of great interest.
- . George B. MacBeath, B.A., from his "STORY OF THE RESTIGOUCHE", Historical Study No.8, a Publication of the New Brunswick Museum of St. John, N.B. in 1954.
- . M. Jean-Paul Dubé of New Carlisle from his unique books on salmon, and in particular the volume, "LE SAUMON" of 1984.
- . Lawrence J. Burpee from his biography, "SANFORD FLEMING", published by Oxford Press in 1915. Responsible for survey of a route for the Intercolonial Railway, Sanford Fleming travelled the Matapedia Valley on snowshoes and dog-sled in 1864. He knew both Daniel Fraser and his brother, Alexander Fraser and became an ardent salmon fisherman for many years.

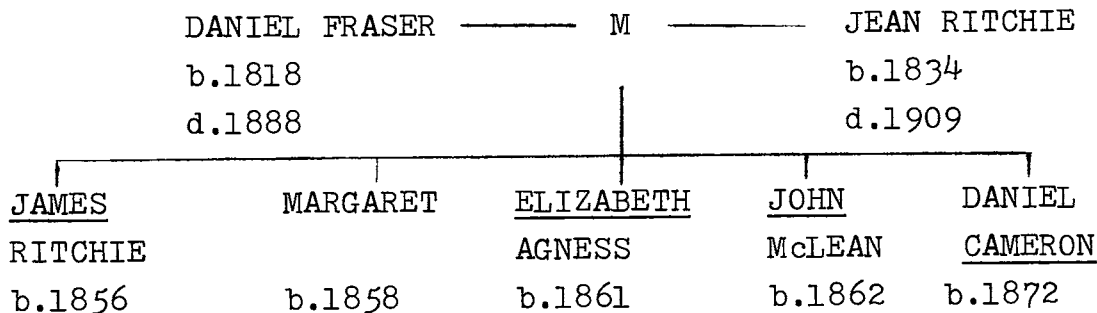
To set the scene for the life and times of Daniel Fraser it is pertinent to recall part of an article published in the American magazine, HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY, in March, 1863, entitled, "THE RESTIGOUCHE":

"...The Matapedia came rolling down from its wilderness heritage, and emerging from the forest, swept around two islands and joined the Restigouche. In the angle which they formed was spread out a thousand acres of waving grain and grass in a green mosaic

"of brilliant contrasts. Graceful elms and groves of maple dotted the many fields; deep green alders fringed the streams; cow-bells tinkled in the neighbouring thickets; flocks of sheep were bleating high up upon a hillside pasture. In the heart of the wilderness was a mansion which for pretension rivalled the Athol House below, and like it was surrounded by a village of out-buildings. No fences were seen, except where the highway bounded the estate; but the grim brotherhood of mountains closed in and gathered the peaceful valley to their bosom ... This is the residence of Daniel Fraser, Esq. There are few houses beyond it. It stands on the limit of civilization;...

"Daniel Fraser is monarch of no small realm. His employees number more than a hundred. In winter they are engaged in lumbering, trapping and hunting, and in summer in farming, stock-raising, salmon fishing, road-making and general repairing. His stock comprises the choicest breeds of cattle, sheep and horses. Vast are the quantities of farm and dairy produce, lumber and furs that he ships to market. Upon his premises are a trading-house, store, blacksmith shop, saddler's shop, dairy, post-office and telegraph station, besides numerous barns and other outbuildings. So extensive an establishment would attract attention in any land; but to find it in the remotest corner of civilization, and a century in advance of the rest of the Province, strikes the stranger with wonder and admiration.

"It is said that Scotchmen are either very mean or generous in the extreme. Daniel Fraser is a Scotchman and belongs to Nature's nobility. His house is supplied with all the luxuries and comforts of life, and all that he has is at the disposal of his guests. Physically, he is hard to beat, for he stands six feet four inches high. He is a Major of the County Militia and consequently makes a commanding officer. He is, moreover, Magistrate, Sheriff, or something of the sort, but does not find his duties arduous. In a word he fills a large space and plays an important part in the social and official circle in which he moves, As a sportsman, though modest, he has scarcely an equal..."

FRASER
FAMILY

The Scottish Highland ancestors of Daniel Fraser landed at Pictou, N.S. in 1773 from the ship "HECTOR". It was at Loch Broom, near Pictou, that Daniel was born in 1818. His brother, Alexander, preceded him at Matapedia for it was from him that Daniel acquired some or all of his Matapedia lands. Their sister, Mary B. Fraser, lived with Daniel at Matapedia. The relatives at Loch Broom and at Matapedia maintained contact over time.

Jean Ritchie Fraser was born in the Parish of Mearns, Glasgow, Scotland. At a young age she came out to Pugwash, Cumberland County, N.S. with her family and thence as a young girl to Restigouche. There she met and married Daniel Fraser of Matapedia.

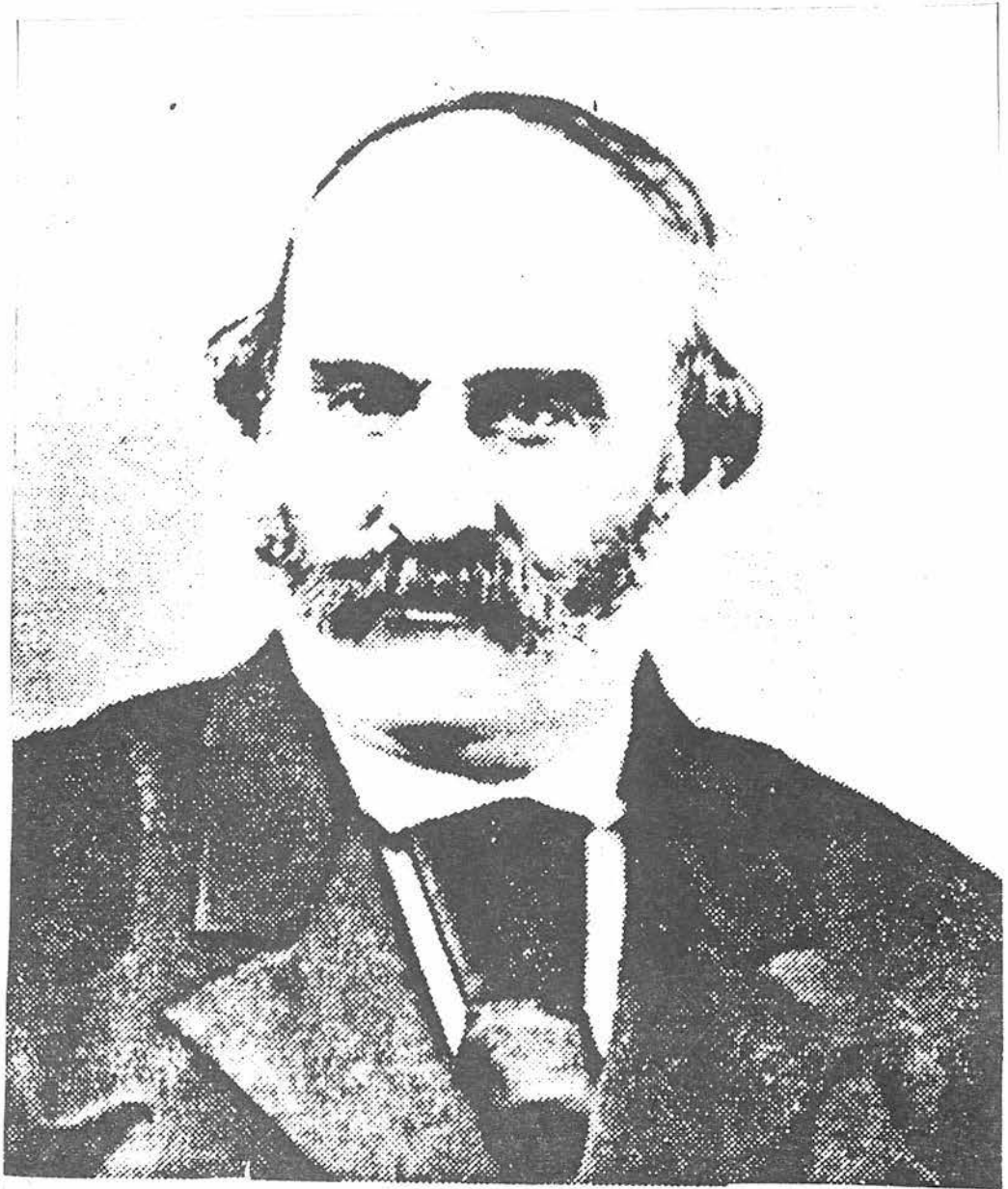
James Ritchie Fraser succeeded his father at Matapedia. Margaret Fraser died in 1864 age 5 years, 5 months.

Elizabeth Fraser grew up to marry R.L. MacDonald. It was at their home that the Widow Jean Fraser lived from 1888 until her death in 1909.

John McLean Fraser lived in Halifax, N.S.

Daniel Cameron Fraser moved West to live in Nelson, B.C.

Upon the death of Daniel Fraser in January, 1888, he was buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery of Matapedia. His sons, John, James and Cameron were witnesses of his burial.



Daniel Fraser

LAND
HOLDINGS
AND
RIVER
RIGHTS

Prior to 1850 and over the following years Daniel Fraser acquired vast land holdings and fishing rights on the Matapedia. At the outset he purchased from his brother, Alexander Fraser, Lot No.42 on the Matapedia intervale - lands held originally by Joseph Davis and subsequently by Thomas Webber. This was the most desirable land in the region. Later in time he secured patent to Lots Nos.40 and 41, extending his properties eastward to halfway down Bell's Island, as well as to most of the Lots on the East side of the Matapedia to Mann Settlement. He considered the fishing rights on the river as belonging to him by virtue of his land holdings. The virgin forests of the Crown Lands bordering the Matapedia provided ample scope for hunting, trapping and lumbering.

ROYAL
MAIL
AND
STAGE
COACH

The War of the American Revolution and the War of 1812-1814 raised serious concern in Canada regarding secure routes for both civil and military purposes from the St.Lawrence to Atlantic tide-water. As a result the survey and construction of the Kempt Road from Metis to Restigouche was undertaken.

In his time Daniel Fraser secured the contract for conveying the Royal Mail through the Matapedia Valley and also was involved in a stage coach service as the route improved.

Some idea of the primitive state of travel on this road as late as 1864 is reflected in the following account of Sanford Fleming's experience as a surveyor for the Intercolonial Railway:

"...From here (St.Flavie) he walked on snowshoes to Lake Matapedia with one Alexander Fraser of Pictou. They had small dog-sleds to carry their supplies drawn by three faithful dogs, Gaspé, Bruce and Wallace, Fleming's companions in many a long journey. A hard day's travel brought them to the North end of Lake Matapedia, but a supper of trout and partridge, with a smoke and a chat with an old Scotch settler, made up for much discomfort. The next

"day they arrived at the forks of the Matapedia.

(Causapsca of today.)

'Left at 7 o'clock,' says the diary, 'after breakfast on moose muffle and pancakes. Beautiful sunny morning. Down calley of Metapedia. Sleigh broke down; left it behind. Arrived at Evans' shanty at noon; travelled 11 miles. (Thomas Evans was at Assemetquaghan.) Evans' shanty say 20 by 15, walls 3 feet high. Contains family, a horse (the first we have seen since Métis) cocks, hens and everything living about the establishment; home-made furniture and a spinning wheel. On to the mouth of Metapedia over difficult ground. Journey today 33 miles!.. "

Such was travel along the Matapedia valley in the earlier years of Daniel Fraser at Matapedia and an indication of the difficulties he faced in the maintenance of subsequent mail and stage coach service.

And though Sanford Fleming did not record it, one can well imagine how he appreciated the hospitality of the Daniel Fraser home before proceeding on his journey to Dalhousie and eventually to Halifax.

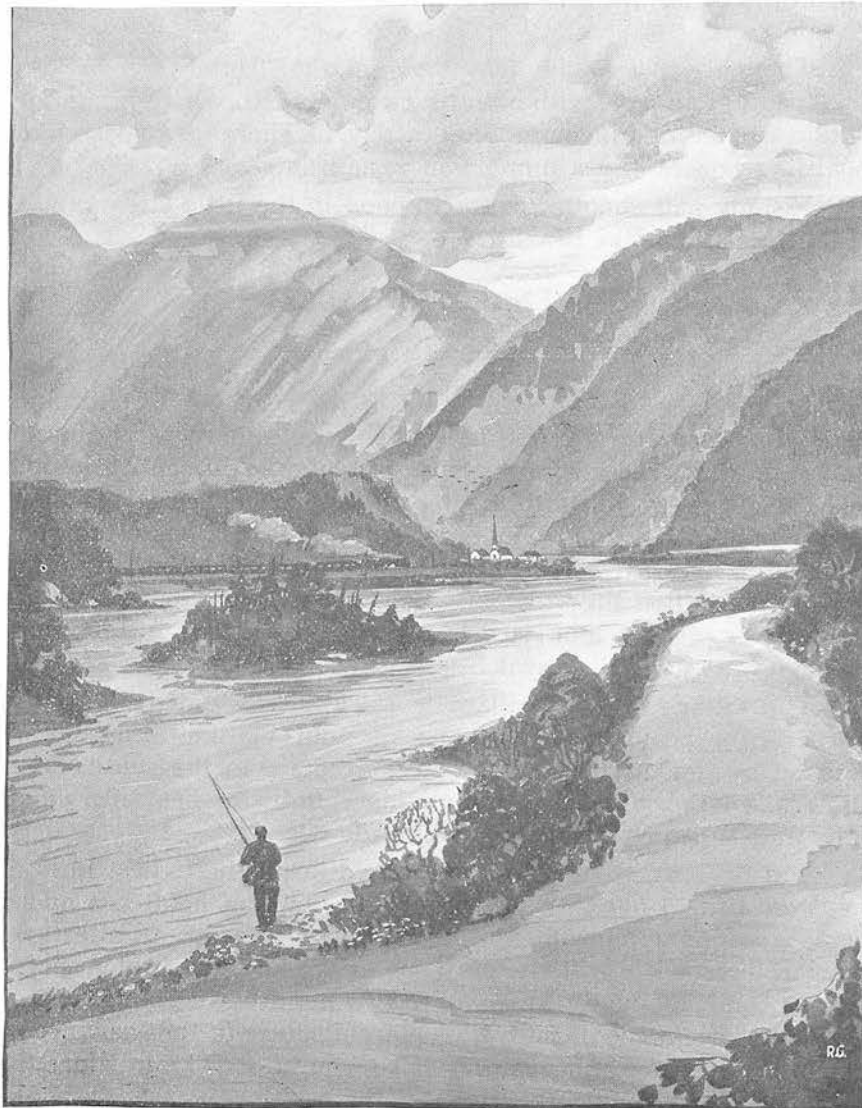
SALMON
ANGLING

The remarkable resource of Atlantic salmon in the Matapedia-Restigouche rivers had been known to the Micmac Indians of the region from the mists of time. With the arrival and early settlement of Europeans, and particularly with that of Scots following the Fall of New France, the commercial fishery of salmon was a seasonal industry and major export.

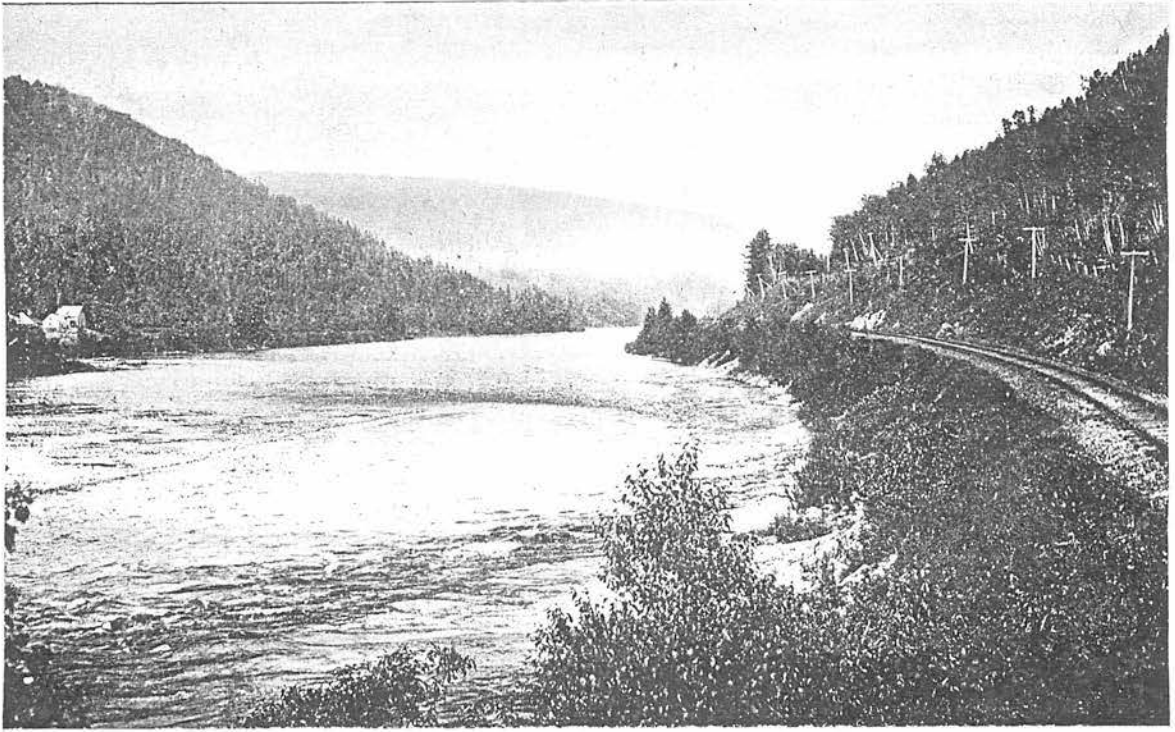
The later development of sport fishing with rod, reel and fly is attributed to British Army Officers from garrison regiments at Halifax and Quebec. In their sporting circle the word spread that the river pools of the domain of Daniel Fraser of Matapedia provided superb fishing for Atlantic salmon in season. Of one such pool, Dean Sage wrote in THE RESTIGOUCHE AND ITS SALMON FISHING :

"...The Matapedia pool begins a little above the junction of the Restigouche and Matapedia rivers...it is, by far, the best pool in the river...in the days of Fraser I have known of forty salmon being taken from this pool in one day; but there were twenty anglers at work, and probably more fish lost than saved..."

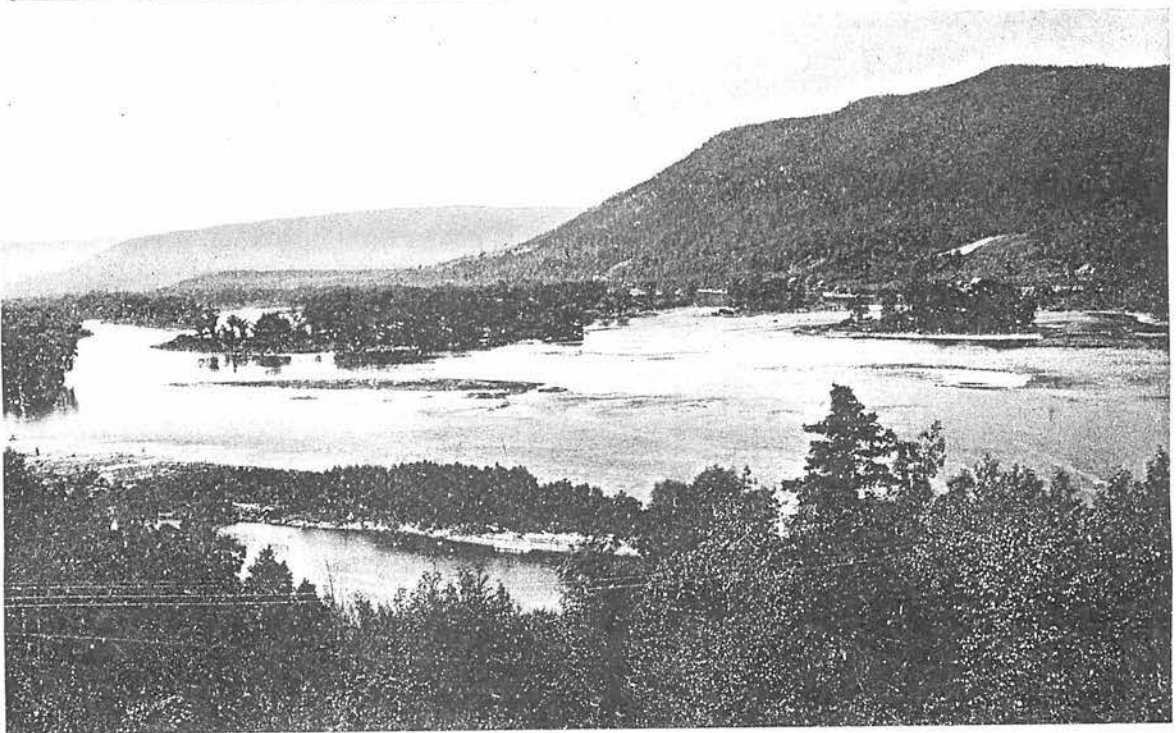
The combined influence of gradually increasing travel via the Matapedia Valley route and the seasonal influx of ardent anglers led to the evolution of Daniel Fraser's ever hospitable home to an inn or hotel. In 1880 the prestigious RESTIGOUCHE SALMON CLUB acquired from Daniel Fraser not only his fishing rights on the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers but his inn or hotel as Club Headquarters.



THE MATAPEDIA VALLEY



THE VALLEY OF THE METAPEDIA



ON THE RESTIGOUCHE

EPILOGUE

More than a century has passed by since Daniel Fraser's death and burial in the Matapedia cemetery that he had donated to the Presbyterian Church. Many of his contemporaries have been forgotten but such was his personality and his influence that his name lives on in remembrance.

In the words of "THE 75th ANNIVERSARY BOOK OF MATAPEDIA", Daniel Fraser was a kind man and helped all the ethnic groups that came to settle in the Restigouche and Matapedia Townships. He donated the site for the first Roman Catholic chapel of Matapedia.

He was the first Postmaster and held that post from 1864 until his death in 1888. He served also as Warden of the County of Bonaventure.

One thousand acres of the land belonging originally to Daniel Fraser and the related salmon fishing rights were acquired by the Restigouche Salmon Club. In occupying the residence of Daniel Fraser as its Clubhouse, the Board of the Club stipulated that great care be taken so that any repairs would not alter its original style.

The CAMPBELLTON GRAPHIC of March 3, 1932 recorded the Fraser family succession at Matapedia as follows:

"Died-At his home in Matapedia, Qué., on February 25, James R. Fraser, only surviving member of one of the oldest families of that place. In his 78th year, the eldest son of the late Daniel Fraser who came from Pictou County, N.S. a number of years ago, and whose home was the present Restigouche Salmon Club - his mother was Jean Ritchie of Glasgow, Scotland. The deceased was a Presbyterian in religion and a Conservative in politics.

Leaves his wife; 2 sons: James and William of Matapedia; 4 daughters: Mrs. William Keays of Matapedia, Mrs. Charles B. Adams of Bellingham, Wash., Mrs. J.A. McPherson of Port Daniel, Qué., and Florence of the staff of the Dalhousie Public Health Clinic, Halifax, N.S.

Interment in the family lot at Matapedia.

Atlantic Ocean

