

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAYTELEGRAPH COMES TO GASPESIA

An important step in ameliorating the isolation of Gaspesian communities was the arrival of telegraph in the decade 1870-1880.

KEN ANNETT

TELEGRAPH IN GASPESIA

PREAMBLE

So accustomed are we to having the news and views of the world in our homes via telephone, radio, television and computer that it is becoming more and more difficult to imagine a time when our Gaspesian ancestors had none of these "wonders" of communication. It is remarkable that no less than 336 years passed by in Gaspesia from the time of Jacques Cartier's visit until the first telegraph line linked the District with the world outside. It is also remarkable that the story of the telegraph in Gaspesia has been so neglected that many of the details may now be beyond recall. In presenting the following sketch, drawn from various sources, GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY hopes that those persons with information on the era of telegraph will place it on record as an interesting part of our heritage.

HISTORIC
EFFORTS

The scientific research that would lead eventually to telegraphy began in England as early as 1747 when Sir William Watson demonstrated that an electric current could be transmitted along a considerable length of wire. A primitive telegraph was developed in Scotland in 1753. Research in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland the U.S.A. was continued by such talented scientists as Galvani, Ampère, Dyar, Gauss and Wheatstone. The elementary telegraph circuit that evolved consisted of a contact device (a "key", if hand operated) that makes and breaks the connection between a source of current and the line, according to the signalling code, and the pulses of current passing to the distant end of the line actuate the receiving device (a sounder).

The name of Samuel F.B. Morse, a U.S. artist and later professor of natural science at Yale University, is universally associated with the telegraph as a result of the code bearing his name. From 1850 to the 1920's Morse was the code most generally used. He is often credited with the invention of the telegraph on his return to the United States from a trip to Europe in 1832 during which he became acquainted with the works of Michael Faraday, but he definitely produced a telegraph instrument that was exhibited in 1837. A full-scale demonstration of the telegraph between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Md. was given in 1844 and the

Electric Telegraph Company was formed in 1845.

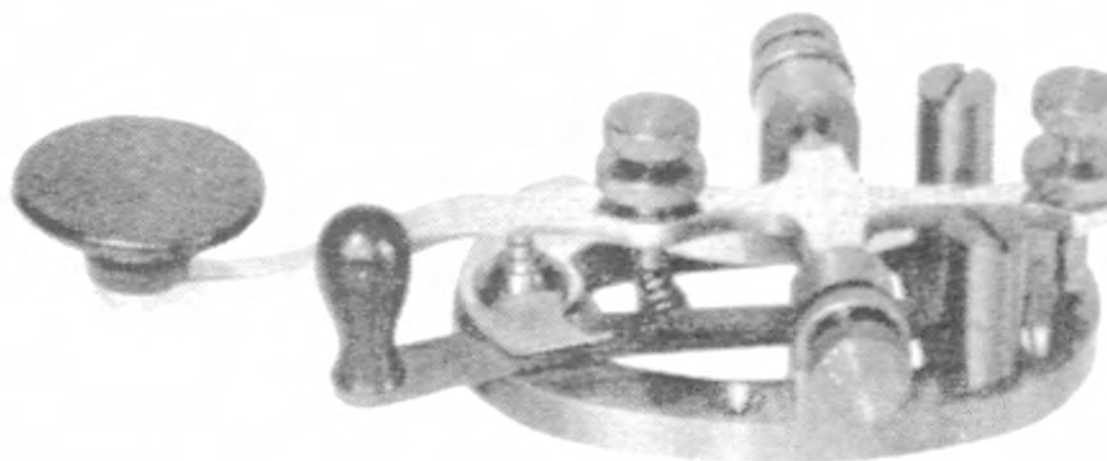
INTERNATIONAL MORSE CODE

A	• —	1	• — — — —
B	— • • •	2	• • — — —
C	— • — •	3	• • • — —
D	— • • •	4	• • • • —
E	• (1 UNIT)	5	• • • • •
F	• • — •	6	— • • • •
G	— — •	7	— — • • •
H	• • • •	8	— — — — • •
I	• •	9	— — — — •
J	• — — — —	0	— — — — —
K	— • —		
L	• — • •	PERIOD	• — • • —
M	— —	COMMA	— — • • — —
N	— •	COLON	— — — — • •
O	— — —	QUERY	• • — — • •
P	• — — •	APOSTROPHE	• — — — — •
Q	— — • —	HYPHEN	— • • • • —
R	• — •	FRACTION BAR	— • • — — •
S	• • •	PARENTHESES	— • — — • —
T	— (3 UNITS)	QUOTATION MARKS	• — • • — •
U	• • —		
V	• • • —		
W	• — —		
X	— • • —		
Y	— • — —		
Z	— — • •		

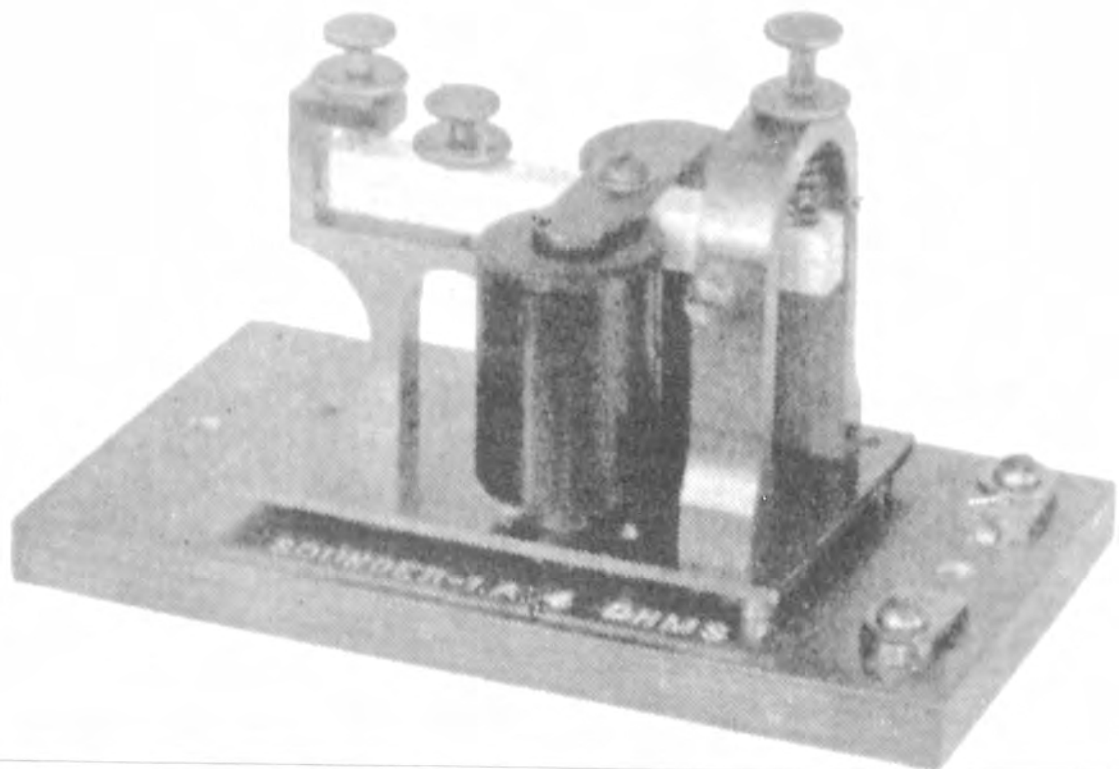
FIG. 6.—INTERNATIONAL MORSE CODE

Duration of DOT taken as one unit, that of DASH as three units. Space between character components is one unit, between characters three units and between **words** six units.

3.



MORSE SENDING KEY. SINGLE LEVER. SHOWING HORIZONTAL KNIFE FOR MAKING AND BREAKING THE CIRCUIT.



MORSE SOUNDER OR RECEIVING INSTRUMENT.

TELEGRAPH
COMES TO
QUEBEC

In Quebec the significance of the telegraph as an important new means of communication was quickly realized. In 1847 the MONTREAL TELEGRAPH COMPANY was incorporated and by the end of that year had extended its line eastward to Quebec City. Downriver from the Old Capital progress would not be as rapid, as we find reflected in the following extract from the newspaper, GAZETTE, of 1894.

Telegraph line enabled news from ships to be sent to New York

As the speed of travel increased during the Victorian era, so did the public's appetite for news of distant places. These letters from The Gazette of January 1894 reveal an ingenious scheme for providing transatlantic news from arriving ships to the Associated Press wire service.

Sir, Mr. Easson, of Toronto, in Saturday's Star states how he overtook James Poustle, superintendent of the construction of the line at Trois Pistoles moving down the shore with the line builders, finally reaching Father Point (Pointe au Père, just north of Rimouski) on May 23, 1859.

On turning up an old shipping book, I find the following:

S.S. Sarah Sands, Sept. 1, 1854; paid telegram to Rivière du Loup 3 shillings (60 cents). S.S. Ottawa, July 8, 1854; to and from 4 shillings 9 pence (95 cents).

Can Mr. Easson say when this line to Rivière du Loup was built? Although the Anchor line of steamers ran regularly to Quebec in 1859, there is no mention of telegrams to Father Point until Nov. 5. Was the line to Father Point working all that summer? As I also had a great deal to do in the telegraphing line below Quebec from 1854 to close on the '80s, I feel interested in having these questions answered.

AN OLD QUEBECER

Montreal Jan. 3, 1894

Referring to an article written by me for the Monetary Times relating the circumstances of the building, by the Montreal Telegraph company, in 1859, of a line to Father Point for the purpose of intercepting the ocean steamships belonging to the Allan line, and obtaining from them the latest old country news, to be forwarded by telegraph to the New York Associated Press ahead of the steamer's arrival at Quebec. "An Old Quebecker" writes to the Montreal *Gazette* stating that a shipping book in his possession shows that a telegraph line was in operation between Montreal and Rivière du Loup, en bas, as early as 1854. The entry in the old

POST FROM THE PAST

shipping book is no doubt quite correct. As a matter of fact, a telegraph line was in operation between Quebec and Rivière du Loup as early as 1848.

My article to the Monetary Times read "Jim Poustle, who superintended the construction of most of the Montreal Telegraph company's wires, and his hardy gang of French-Canadian line builders, set out from Rivière du Loup early in April 1859 to build a telegraph line to Father Point." Somewhere about the first week in May, I overtook the line builders some distance beyond Trois Pistoles and remained with them until they reached Ile au Bic.

The new line was in full operation between Father Point and Quebec on the 23rd of May, 1859, and has been ever since.

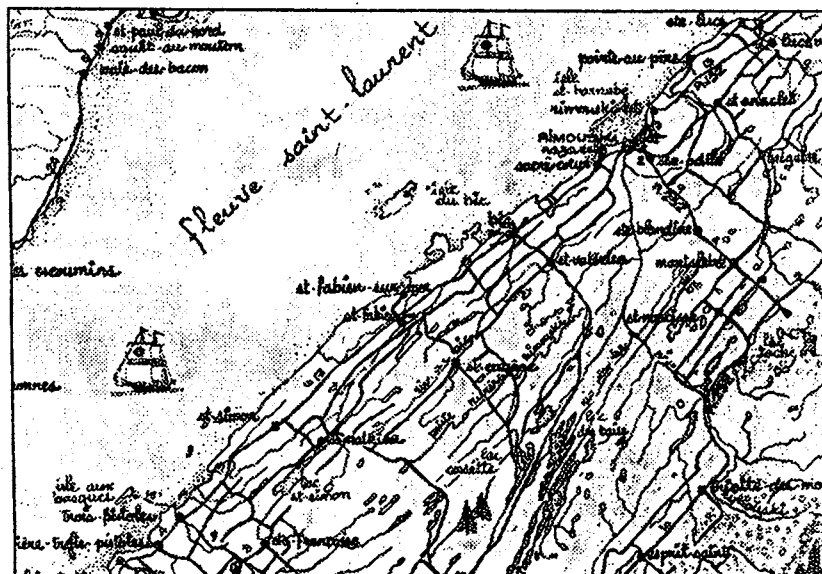
Only the Allan steamers called at Father Point during the season of 1859.

The Allans built a lighthouse at that place, at their own expense, for the benefit of their ocean steamship service. The government subsequently took this lighthouse off their hands, and, I believe, paid them for their outlay.

I have no recollection of an Anchor line steamer reporting herself at Father Point during the season of 1859.

For "An Old Quebecer's" further information, I may say that a telegraph line was built from Quebec to Father Point as early as 1848, with the view of reporting vessels passing up and down the St. Lawrence River. Ocean steam ships had not then begun to run to Quebec or Montreal, and but few masters of sailing vessels took the trouble to report themselves.

The government paid no subsidy. the line was found to be ahead of its



Telegraph line sent ships' news from Pointe au Père to Quebec City.

time and did not pay, and in 1851 that portion of it between Rivière du Loup and Father Point was taken down, the wire being used in the construction of a new line from Rivière du Loup to Woodstock, N.B. where a connection was made with a line to Saint John and Halifax.

RON V. EASSON
 Superintendent, News Dept.
 Great Northwestern Telegraph Co.
 Toronto Jan. 4, 1894

GASPESIA
GETS THE
TELEGRAPH

At the time of Confederation the possibility of providing a telegraph line around the Gaspé Peninsula was under serious discussion. In support of this project Gaspesia had two very capable Members of Parliament whose careers have been recalled previously by GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY, (Ref. Dr. Pierre Fortin- Art.No.029 -SPEC 81-01-12 and Dr. Théodore Robitaille -Art.No.035 - SPEC 81-08-12.) Through their initiative the MONTREAL TELEGRAPH COMPANY agreed to establish a telegraph line from Matapedia to Cap-des-Rosiers on condition that each municipality furnish the required number of cedar telegraph poles and that free transportation for its workmen and materials be provided.

References to typical resolutions passed by the municipal councils are to be found in the HISTOIRE DE NOUVELLE by Reginald Day and in PERCÉ-ITS NATURE-ITS HISTORY by the Rev. C.E.Roy. In the case of Percé we have the interesting details that the municipality resolved to provide:

"...eight hundred and thirty cedar posts, good and sound, twenty-five feet long, twelve inches in diameter at a distance of five feet from the large end; moreover the bark to have been peeled from these posts to a distance of five feet from the large end...distributed and placed on the south side of the road every fifty-five yards...or thirty-two posts per mile..."

In a subsequent resolution the Council voted \$25.00 to buy the seventy-six poles still required.

In time the municipalities all did their part and their respective Members of Parliament obtained grants from the Federal Government to cover the cost of transporting the workmen of the MONTREAL TELEGRAPH COMPANY and their material. The line from Matapedia along Bay Chaleur to Gaspé and thence to Cap-des-Rosiers was completed without delay.

At approximately the same time the telegraph line was extended eastward from Rimouski and Father Point to Matane. Beyond Matane the rugged nature of the north coast of Gaspesia and the relative isolation of its communities delayed the installation of the line for a decade. It was not until the early 1880's that this gap was closed and the whole perimeter of the Peninsula served by telegraph.

TELEGRAPH
NETWORK
NOTES

- * Mrs.Edmund Flynn, sister of Rev.Guilmet, was the first telegraph operator at Percé according to the Rev.C.E.Roy in his book, PERCÉ.
- * The National Archives of Canada has records for 1871/72 of Edwin Pope of the Montreal Telegraph Company. He refers to J.Ferguson as the operator at Grand Metis and reports that he moved from there to Gaspé Basin - probably to open the office at Gaspé. The St.Flavie operator was Clarence McMillan who had replaced a Miss Mott. In a letter to a Mr.McLeod, Pope extolled the virtues of Matapedia as a place for him to settle his family. Records indicate that a number of women were telegraph operators.
- * In an interesting recall of the early telegraph in Gaspé Miss Dorothy Phillips reports that her grandmother, Sarah Miller, and her mother, Mrs.Phillips operator the Peninsula telegraph office for almost 100 years between them. Her mother handled her first telegram when she was only 14 years old and gave up the telegraph work when she was 81 years of age. The Malbay/Barachois office was operated early on by Louisa Miller of Peninsula. The office at the North Coast station of Fame Point (Pointe-à-la-Renommée) had Venetia Ascah of Peninsula as the operator (For reference to the Fame Point office see "LES COMMUNICATIONS EN GASPEISIE - Jean-Louis Roy. Cahiers Gaspésie Culturelle. Musée de la Gaspésie. 1984)
The Gaspé Basin office was operated for many years by Mr.John Annett.
- * M.Guy Richard, a native of Rivière-la-Madeleine, has recalled, in conversation, the importance of the telegraph in ameliorating the isolation of the Gaspesian communities of the North Coast .



EDWIN POPE, OFFICER OF THE MONTREAL
TELEGRAPH COMPANY AND RESPONSIBLE
FOR THE LINE AND OFFICES IN GASPESIA
DURING 1871/72.

National Archives of Canada.PA194825