

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

MAGDALEN ISLANDS IN 1831

\*\*\*\*\*

REPORT OF LIEUT. BADDELEY, R.E.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ken Annett

MAGDALEN ISLANDS IN 1831

BACKGROUND

The interesting reports of Lieut. Baddeley, R.E., have appeared in previous issues of GASPE OF YESTERDAY. In Vol.2, article 67, "MEET SOME GASPESIANS OF 150 YEARS AGO", recalled the extensive travels of Lieut. Baddeley in Gaspesia during 1833. From Metis on the St. Lawrence he crossed to tidewater at the head of Bay Chaleur and followed the South coast of the Gaspesian peninsula to Gaspé. His remarkable JOURNAL recounts not only the physical features he noted en route but the social aspects of his meetings with many of the leading Gaspesians of the 1830's.

Prior to his exploration of Gaspesia, Lieut. Baddeley had travelled to the Magdalen Islands in 1831. As these Gulf Islands have long had links with Gaspesia his report on them is of particular interest to GASPE OF YESTERDAY. It is appropriate to recall below extracts from his reports on the Magdalens to the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec. Chronologically, this report of 1831 serves to bridge the gap of time between those periods reflected in article 183, "1777 DIARY OF THE MAGDALEN ISLANDS" and articles 134 and 170 based on the observations of Dr. John M. Clarke and Victoria Hayward.

Two of the men mentioned by Lieut. Baddeley had Gaspé connections. Phillips Franklin Callbeck, Deputy Collector of Customs, a son of Phillips and Ann Coffin Callbeck of P.E.I. was a Major in the Gaspé Militia. Mr. Bruce of the Customs House had been a resident of Bonaventure County and is often mentioned in the Rev. George Milne DIARIES.

# Magdalen Islands

Published in

(1778.)

*The Geological Notes added in 1832*  
Based from Stone by Anne P. G. Woodhead

North Cape Rock 638.

Old Harry

Wolfe Point

Great Entry Bay

Shagg Island

L'opital

Albion Island

Similar to those of Amherst Island

House Harbour

Etang du Nord

Grindstone Island

CAPE GRINDSTONE

NORTH WEST CAPE

Similar to those of Amherst Island

Seal I.

LECHOURIE

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

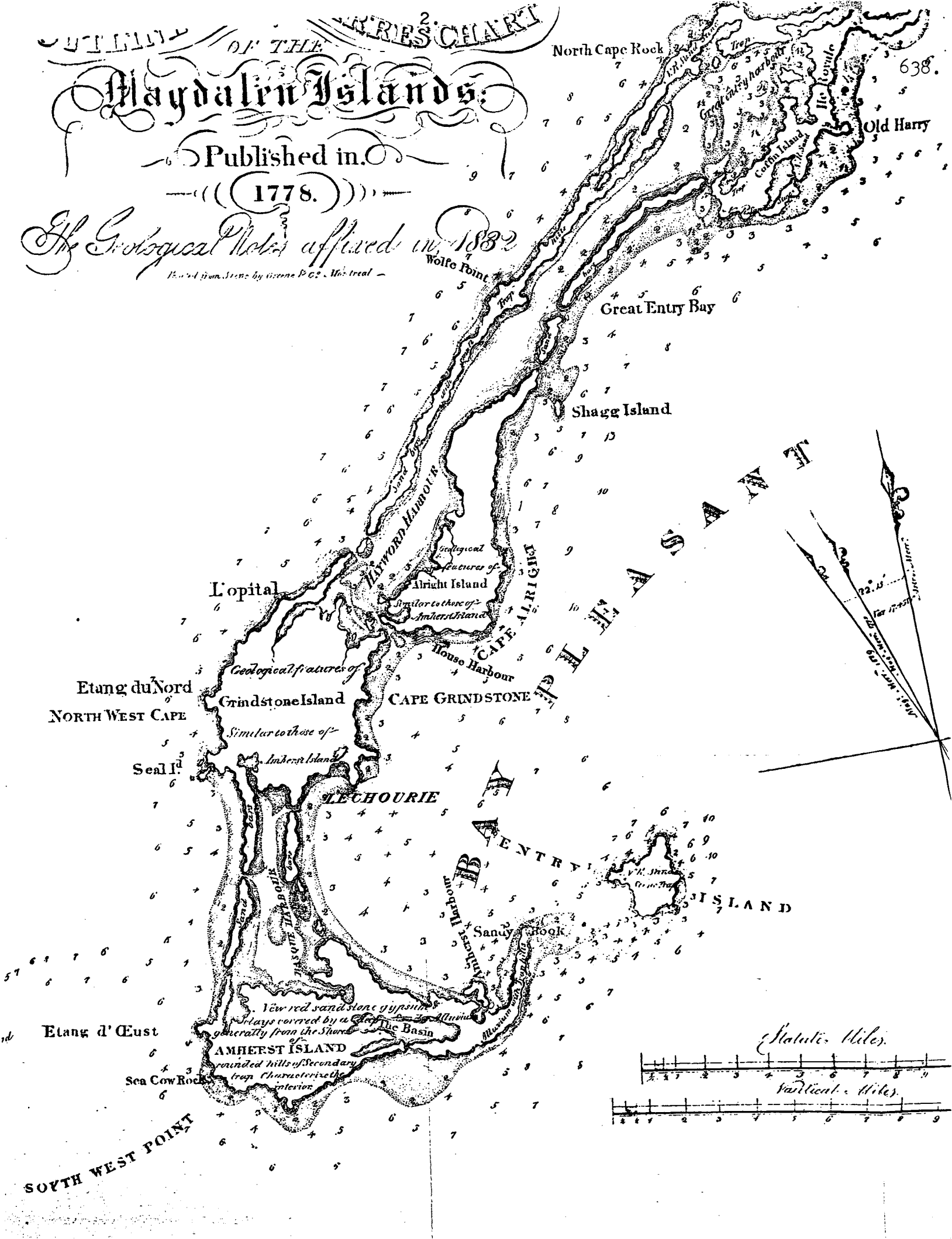
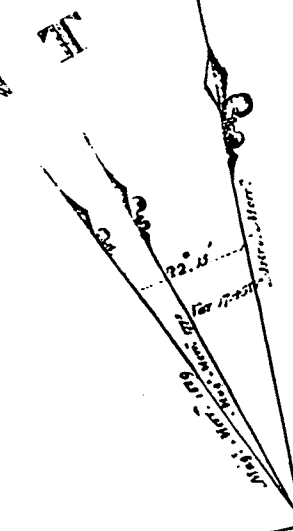
ENTRY

Etang d'Est

AMHERST ISLAND

Sea Cow Rock

SOUTH WEST POINT



## INTRODUCTORY.

In the autumn of the year 1831, the Government hired Brig *King Fisher*, being under orders for the Gulf upon Colonial services, I was honored with His Excellency Lord Aylmer's commands to proceed to the Magdalen Islands, by that opportunity, and, on my return, to report upon them, under certain heads of instructions, with which I was furnished.

Owing to the lateness of the season, and to the necessity we were under of visiting other places, our detention off the Magdalen Islands was only of nine days duration, a period totally inadequate to afford me the opportunity of giving a full description of them; a fact which I must urge as *one* excuse for what will be found defective in the present attempt.

Upon submitting my Reports to His Excellency, he condescended to suggest that I should present to the Literary and Historical Society at Quebec, such portions of them as might be likely to interest that body; on doing which they were ordered to be published in the third volume of its Transactions.

The principal suppressions are in the third Report, which, having been originally of a military character, contained matter now, for obvious reasons, withheld.

The writer can put forth little claim to originality in the first and fourth Reports, as they are, for the most part, compilations of the opinions and assertions of others. This, indeed, is necessarily the case, as the want of time and experience on such subjects would render negative those opinions which he might otherwise have ventured to offer. Almost all such as have been advanced were either obtained or confirmed upon the spot, and are, consequently, entitled to credit, particularly as the individuals consulted are among the best informed and most respectable on these islands.

---

The Magdalen Islands, with four exceptions, \* form an

---

\* The Bird Islands, Byron Island, Entry Island, and Deadman's Island are the exceptions; other detached portions are mere islets, as, indeed, are the first and last of these.

almost continuous chain of land, about forty-two miles in length, and directed nearly N. E., S. W. This chain embraces all that is either politically or commercially of importance in the group; an advantage it is ever likely to retain, as long, at least, as its harbours remain open; \* a maritime feature in which all other portions of the cluster are deficient.

The first, or southernmost portion of this chain, is Amherst Island; the second, in northerly succession, is Grindstone Island; the third, Alright Island; the fourth, that vermicular line of coast which, first stretching away to the north-eastward as far as the "north-east" point, suddenly rounds to the westward, forming Coffin's Island and Grosse Isle, then returning, on a nearly parallel course, encloses that singular interlockage of water, having Grand Entry Harbour at its north-eastern extremity, and Haywood and House Harbours at its south-western. Between Amherst Island and Grindstone Island there is a similar water interlockage, called Havre Basque, but, unlike the others, quite inaccessible to vessels.†

This chain, which may be considered as forming one island, into which the sea has made deep longitudinal inroads, (a remark substantially, though not positively, correct, as that element has probably thrown up the sand banks which now enclose it,) presents, on its eastern side, an outline of coast on which the flow of the tides, and the

---

\* There is reason to suppose that they are gradually closing.

\* These natural canals may be considered the *links* by which the chain is united: in process of time these links will become filled up by the drifting in of sand, and what now, in plan, resembles a double chain shot, will then bear more analogy to shot united by a double bar.

beating of the waves, &c. have, as was to be expected, produced a much more sensible effect than on the opposite coast, which, instead of being, like the former, characterised by bays and harbours, is deficient in them almost altogether; a fact sufficiently obvious as regards the whole chain, but peculiarly so, if the eye be confined to a latitude southward of Cape Alright.\*

First, in point of present importance in this chain, is Amherst Island, the form and size of which would be nearly that of an oval, having about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles for its axis, (the former nearly east and west) were it not for a narrow isthmus and peninsula, the former of which, stretching to eastward, connects the main land with the latter, in which is situated the only harbour on the island. As this harbour

is the best which is settled in the group, it becomes necessary to give a particular description of it, and of the surrounding country. The isthmus alluded to is caused by a *bight* of water, called Basin Bay,† which, encroaching on the southern shore of the island, forms a species of salt water lake, which nearly washes the foot of the "Demoiselle," a remarkable insulated hill, 260 feet in altitude above the sea,‡ from the summit of which a fine commanding view may be obtained over the whole of the harbour, about 6000 feet to eastward, and of the anchorage ground in Pleasant Bay, about the same distance; while the only road into the

---

\* It is worthy of remark, that the clays and gypsums on the islands are met with, principally, if not entirely, to the southward of the same place, and on the same shore. Observe that clay is readily diffused through water, and that gypsum is soluble in 460 parts of that element.

† Some of the oldest inhabitants on Amherst Island remember of seeing in this bay vessels drawing 15 feet water,—it is now inaccessible to boats.

‡ Barometrically measured.

interior (following the direction of the isthmus) crosses the side of the Demoiselle, near its southern and south-western base. This isthmus is about three miles in length, and half a mile wide; it leads from Amherst Harbour to the settlements \* on the north-west shore, distant about seven miles.

Amherst Harbour is bounded on the west, south, and south-east by the peninsula before-mentioned, which, making a sudden turn to the north-east, terminates about four miles from the harbour, in that low sandy pit called "Sandy Hook." The channel into the harbour runs nearly parallel with this shore, at the distance of about 600 or 700 feet. The land, by falling away from the summit of the Demoiselle towards the harbour, secures it to the north-westward, while an arm of rock, elbowing into the sea, completes its circle of security to the northward. This arm,† or natural mole, has a variable altitude above the sea of from 30 to 60 feet, its length is about 2000 feet, and greatest breadth 450; its precipitous cliffs on the shore are surrounded by a narrow belt of sand, except in a few prominent parts where the sea washes their bases. The widest and highest portion of this arm is about the centre, from whence it falls away, both in height and width, towards the north-eastern extremity, where these dimensions are

---

\* I measured with the barometer the height of a bald hill, immediately overlooking these settlements, and found it to agree nearly with that of the *Demoiselle*; another hill to north-westward was judged to exceed it by 20 or 30 feet, but certainly did not exceed 300 feet of altitude above the sea, and is probably the highest land in the *chain*. The highest land on Entry Island may be 400 feet, the loftiest in the group.

† Its shape is like that of the human arm: formerly it was an islet, indeed it is represented as such in Des Barres' chart, published in 1778; it is now joined to the peninsula by a sand bank.

30 and 100 feet respectively. The opposite, or south-eastern, side of the harbour, distant from this end of the mole about 1000 feet, is in general a low sandy ridge, with a few small insulated hills, \* of a conical form, upon it; one of the nearest of these hills was found to be about 5000 feet from the mole. The rest of the country not described, immediately surrounding the harbour, is low and slightly undulated, with here and there a few scattered circular mounds; precipitous cliffs, however, are gradually formed on the shores as the foot of the Demoiselle is approached.

The entrance into the harbour is narrow, but straight, and vessels drawing from 11 to 12 feet water readily enter at high tide, and become secure against every wind; should they shake, which often happens, they can receive no injury, the bottom being a soft ooze. The channel runs about 300 feet from the south-eastern extremity of the mole.

It must not be understood, that all portions of the watery expanse within the mole will receive vessels drawing 11 feet water, as much the largest half is only fit to receive boats. No vessel must pass to northward or north-westward of the prolongation of a somewhat remarkable dilated sand spit, which will be noticed upon the right hand on passing within the mole. The rectangular space southward of this line of prolongation, although small, will hold sixty small craft at a time, and that number has been seen within the harbour more than once. † Secure against all

---

\* I have no doubt that these hills are composed of trap; but they were not visited.

† Amherst Harbour, however, appears to be fast experiencing the fate of Basin Bay; even within the last twenty years its entrance is said to have been narrowed at least as many feet.

winds, vessels could ride at anchor in four or five fathom water outside the mole. \*

Amherst Island is connected with Grindstone Island by almost continuous spits of sand, † which enclose between

---

\* Mr. Cormier is of this opinion, but both Captain Bayfield and Captain Douglas think that a gale from the N. E. is to be dreaded. With deference to such good authority, however, the local experience of the first named gentleman gained during, I believe, a period of twenty-five or thirty years, carries with it much weight, and who, in advancing so opposite an opinion, assigns as a cause for the fact, that storms are not to be dreaded, the gradual shoaling of the water from shore, by which the waves are deprived of their force before they reach the anchorage ground; and this remark applies to the whole of Pleasant Bay. The two following facts are corroborative; first, wrecks, although common enough on other portions of the coast of this chain, never occur, or rather never have occurred, to my knowledge in this bay; the second fact, equally cogent, is that no boulders of a large size, and, indeed, very few of a small description, are seen on the shores of Pleasant Bay, and rarely any other fragments of rock than such angular pieces as have been detached evidently from formations *in situ*; this is the more remarkable, because some of the islands met with in a passage to the Magdalen Islands have their shores crowded with foreign debris: Green Island for instance, where some of the boulders are of enormous size.

† These spits of sand are evidently recent formations, increasing daily, and were originally produced by the influence of the rocky lands upon the tidal waters and current bearing with them their sedimentary deposits. It appears farther probable, that the bars or spits of land to westward were formed first by the *direct* force of the waves, and subsequently those to eastward by the recoil or back-water. The original rocky islands are boldly scarped, but the new creations are low and shelving. The eastern shore, from the northern extremity of Amherst Island to Grindstone Island, is one unvaried strip of the finest and smoothest sand, over which the waves gently ripple at the very moment they are in other places on this coast foaming against the rocky capes. Nothing occurs to relieve the quiet monotony of the scene but the half buried exuviae of the crab, the lobster, or of some of the molluscous tribe of animals, among the genera of which the *natua* and *solen* are most common: it is worthy of notice, that shells of the same species with those found in such abundance in the loose arenaceous formation on the left bank of the Beaufort River are met with here and in other places in the Gulf. This formation is worthy of notice, and in a small pamphlet on the Organic Remains of Canada, compiled in the spring of 1823, to assist by its sale the funds of the Orphan's Asylum of Quebec, I introduced, in a note at the last page, some account of it, the only one hitherto published. But as this account is meagre, and I think the subject sufficiently interesting, it will probably form a separate article, to be submitted to the Society on some future occasion.

them a shallow salt water lake, called Havre Basque, now (whatever it may have been) inaccessible to vessels; and it has been already observed that this feature is analogous to what is noticed between Grindstone Island and Coffin's Island, with this essential difference, however, that the lake in the latter instance is terminated at each extremity by a harbour, which is accessible to vessels. The southernmost of these harbours, or that situated between Grindstone and Cape Alright, to which the name of House Harbour has been given, is the one to which I am now about to direct my attention, as it claims precedence of Grand Entry Harbour, by being more central, by being settled, and by being at the present moment the resort of vessels.

House Harbour is situated nearly due north of Amherst Harbour, from which it is distant about twelve miles by water, and twenty by land. It lies between the hilly islands of Grindstone and Alright; the former and Amherst Island secure it, and the anchorage in the bay outside, from all winds from south to west, while the latter offers an equally secure cover against winds from the north and eastward. The entrance into this harbour lies open to the south eastward, with the exception, that the land of Entry Island, the most elevated in the group, and distant about nine or ten miles, assists in modifying the force of the waves and winds from this quarter of the compass, and, in co-operation with the cause before mentioned, occasions gales from the south-east to be little dreaded by vessels in the bay. \* Within the harbour they are not felt, owing to a spit of sand, or natural wharf, which, terminating at Grindstone Island, to northward on its sea board, forms on that side a sort of low terrace to the harbour at its entrance across, while a shoal also contributes towards the same effect; an advantage, however, which is more than counterbalanced by its not permitting vessels drawing over nine feet water to pass, on



which account, and its not being so capacious, House Harbour is inferior to Amherst Harbour.

This harbour is commanded on the Cape Grindstone side by cliffs of from 20 to 100 feet in altitude, but the immediate shore on the opposite side is a low sandy beach, stretching away to the foot of a hill, in one level of about 400 feet or upwards. The land about Cape Alright is rather elevated, and abuts in precipitous cliffs (perhaps 50 feet in height) upon the shore, but as the harbour is approached, these cliffs are succeeded by the low sandy flat before-mentioned. Within the harbour, there are two or three small islets; the most remarkable of these (the others being mere sand banks) is one composed of red sandstone, whence the name of Red Island, having a natural scarp of about 30 feet in height all around it. It is long in proportion to its width, which, I believe, in no place exceeds 100 feet, and the channel passes longitudinally, close to it on its south-western side. However, as I did not land upon this islet, I cannot write positively concerning it.

---

\* I have already elsewhere observed that Captain Bayfield and Captain Douglas are not of this opinion.

The form of Grindstone Island approaches that of the circle, whose diameter is about five miles, while that of Alright is irregularly elongated to the north-eastward, the greatest breadth, measured from Cape Alright westward, being about three miles, and length north-eastward about nine. Like most of these islands, they are hilly, and the hills are woody and cone shaped, or rounded towards the interior; bare and tabular towards the coast.

Although the regular direction of this chain is N. E; S. W. that part of it embraced by Amherst Island points more northerly. The land beyond Grindstone Island, rounds suddenly to the eastward, and forming the south-easterly portion of Alright Island and shore of House Harbour Bay, subsequently bends north easterly, in a moderate concave line, as far as Grand Entry Harbour, distant about twenty miles from House Harbour.

No settlement has yet been effected on the shores of Grand Entry Harbour and Bay; a circumstance which the reputed infertility of soil will not account for, among a people whose occupations are almost exclusively maritime. Equally secure as are the two other harbours, against all winds, it much surpasses them in the number and size of the vessels it will receive. Brigs drawing from fourteen to fifteen feet water, may enter this harbour at high tide, \* and anchor there in perfect security; the channel, however, is somewhat intricate, and would require buoying. The entrance is formed by two spits of sand, about six or eight hundred feet asunder, through which a strong current

passes as the tide lowers. Two or three miles to northward, within these spits, is situated the centre of the harbour, the water of which, continues to deepen from three to six fathoms, as the base of an elevated hill, with two rounded summits, is approached.

Beyond Grand Entry Harbour, the land again bulges suddenly to the eastward, enclosing Grand Entry Bay to south-eastward, and forming capes like Cape Alright, but not so elevated. After doubling these capes, the outline of the shores bends once more north-easterly, and terminates in that low rounded flat to which the name of Coffin's Island is affixed. This portion of chain is described to consist of a sandy alluvium, full of small lakes or ponds of brackish water. On the contrary, Grosse Isle, a portion of which forms the hilly back ground in Grand Entry Harbour before alluded to, is composed of rocky eminences, which, like those on Amherst Island, Grindstone Island, and Alright Island, were formerly groups, distinctly insulated, but whose insularity, in the present day, is almost (and will eventually be quite) destroyed, by those daily accumulations of sand before alluded to, which are gradually cementing these islands together by two broad barren bands.

As regards the other islands of the cluster, forming no part of the chain to which the foregoing observations bear particular allusion, I have merely to point out their relative position, form, and size; all other information which I possess respecting them, having been already given in my second report.

The Bird Islands, or rather islets, are situated in the prolongation of the chain to the north-eastward, from the most easterly portion of which, they are distant about eighteen miles: they are two in number, and mere rocks, elevated from fifty to one hundred feet above the sea. The northernmost is placed, by Mr. Jones, of His Majesty's ship *Hussar*, in longitude  $61^{\circ} 12' 53''$  west, latitude  $47^{\circ} 50' 28''$  north.

Bryon Island is ten or twelve miles northward of the north-eastern extremity of the chain, its latitude is  $47^{\circ} 48' 8''$  at the north-east point, (Mr. Jones,) from which it extends south-easterly from three to five miles: its breadth being about half a mile.

Entry Island, occupying the most south-easterly portion of the group, is, in form, nearly a circle, whose diameter is about two miles. It is ten miles from House Harbour, and six or eight miles from Amherst Harbour. Between it and Sandy Hook, there is a channel into Pleasant Bay, but seldom used.

Deadman's Island is an insignificant islet, about eight miles westward of Amherst Island. It has obtained its name, according to Mr. Adams, \* from its resemblance, at a distance, to a body laid out for burial.

I shall now close this report, with a few more observations, generally upon the anchorages and soundings around these islands.

The only good anchorage ground to be met with among them, independently of the three harbours described, is in Pleasant Bay, from off Grand Entry Harbour to Amherst Harbour; and the usual and best entrance into this Bay from the westward, is round by the south-east, outside Entry Island. Any where within this Bay, a vessel may find good anchorage, in from three to eight fathoms water, but the vicinity of the harbour affords the best; the gradual shoaling of the water from a distance, besides breaking the force of the waves, as before said, afford vessels plenty of time to select their respective anchorages, and is particularly favorable to them when involved in the fogs, which, in the spring and autumn, are so prevalent, and so frequently occasion wrecks\* on other portions of the coast by concealing the land from the navigator, while his soundings do not intimate its proximity. Some places are mentioned on the western side of the chain, as affording anchorage ground, but it must only be understood during certain winds, as, strictly speaking, this shore, from north to south, is deficient in any secure harbour or bay: vessels sometimes find a temporary security at L'etang des Caps, L'etang du Nord, and L'Opital.

Although the general accuracy of the outline of Des Barres' chart is acknowledged, there are important differences in the present state of the soundings and those laid down on it, which, whether arising from their shifting nature, or from original errors in the chart, should be noticed. Some of these I may venture here to point out; but all details must be left to the well known professional accuracy of Capt. Bayfield, R. N. who, being about to visit these islands in the course of his hydrographic duties, will soon leave us nothing to desire upon this head.

In coming round this point, and nearly opposite Old Harry, the *King Fisher* struck upon a reef, at a distance of

---

\* Four vessels were wrecked on some portion of this chain last year (1831). Colonel Bouchette states, that Captain Fougere, for ten successive years, brought off these islands about 200 shipwrecked persons (see his recent work); but this is evidently erroneous.

## 11.

at least three miles from the shore. Capt. Douglas was taking soundings at the time, as fast as the man could draw and heave, and his last cry had been five fathoms. Upon mentioning this circumstance to Mr. Cormier, we were informed that a reef extended out from the point at least six miles.

From three to five miles S. S. E. of the eastern part of Cape Alright, a shoal exists, not introduced in any chart, on which there is only twelve feet water; it consists of white rocks, over which the sea breaks, in a storm, from the eastward.

About six miles south-west from L'etang du Nord, on the north-west coast, there is a rocky shoal, with only ten feet of water upon it.

The shoals, at the north-east point of the chain, are very dangerous, and extend much farther out than represented in Des Barres' chart, which, likewise, does not shew a sand bank, lying a short distance off Entry Island, to northward, called the Pearl Bank.

In the foregoing description of the topography of these islands, I have availed myself of Des Barres' chart, in those instances in which my own acquaintance with the *locale* is too vague to permit me to write confidently; this assistance, however, can obviously extend only to their mere outline and dimensions.

---

## POPULATION, HABITS, MANNERS, RELIGION.

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, 21ST JANUARY, 1832.

Whether these islands were, or were not, in part settled \* by the French Government, before the conquest of Canada, is a disputed point on which has been, and still is founded, a legal objection on the side of some of the inhabitants to the claims of Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin, to whom they were conceded, by the British Government, in 1798, without the existence, as the complaining party asserts, of any right on the part of the Crown to make such a grant. Two or three judgments, however, having been given recently in the Law Courts of Quebec in favor of the Admiral, and a disposition to admit his claims is now as generally evinced as it was at the period of his visit to the island in 1806; such is the opinion, at least, of Mr. Doucet, the Admiral's agent. This gentleman asserts, upon the authority of some of the oldest residents, that the Magdalen Islands were first settled in 1767, by a Bostonian of the name of Graidly, who, introducing upon Amherst Island four Acadian families, from Prince Edward's Island, commenced, with their assistance, a fishery in seals, sea cows, and cod. Bouchette, however, says, in his recent quarto work, that as early as 1763, there were ten families on the islands, which had

---

\* They were conceded to the Count St. Pierre, by the Duchess of Orleans, in 1720, but it does not appear at that period that any measures were taken to settle them.—(Hist. Gen. des Voyages, p. 676.)

only increased in 1791 to thirteen. It appears, on the authority of the former gentleman, that in 1793, twelve or fifteen families emigrated hither from the French settlement of Miquelon and St. Pierre; and that when Sir Isaac Coffin visited these islands in 1806, the population amounted to about 400; since which time it has continued to increase at the *average* rate of about twenty-six per annum, and amounts now (in 1831) to 1057, of which 580 are below the age of fifteen; 290 from fifteen to thirty; 162 from thirty to sixty; and 25 upwards from sixty to ninety-seven, the age of the oldest inhabitant.

This population is distributed into families or houses, as follows:—98 on Amherst Island, 48 on Grindstone Island, 38 on Alright Island, 5 on Entry Island, and 6 at the East Point on Coffin's Island, making 195 families; of these 20 are of British extraction, and 175 Acadian or French; about half the latter emigrated to these islands, from St. Pierre and Miquelon, in the years 1793 and 1802. In the last fourteen years the population has more than doubled itself, and appears to be now steadily on the rapid increase, wanting only the encouraging hand of Government, and of the

proprietor, to make of the Magdalen Islands, notwithstanding their barren soils, a flourishing little country.

The habits of these islanders are almost exclusively those of fishermen, to which they are accused of adding, occasionally, those of the smuggler and the wrecker; but, whoever believing these accusations, should imagine the former to resemble the habits of the bold, reckless, desperate, European smuggler; or the latter, those of the cowardly caitiff from the same quarter of the globe, who is accused of hanging out false lights to beguile vessels to their ruin, would, in thought, injure a people as little addicted to desperate deeds of illegal enterprise, as to deeds of villainy.

Smuggling, on these islands, is scarcely a breach of the laws, for no law but the law of God is preached upon them; and were not that the case, their neglected and insulated state may well entitle the inhabitants to some indulgence in this respect, particularly, as without a contraband trade, they might sometimes want even the necessaries of life; as long as they are abandoned, therefore, to their own resources, it would be unjust to deprive them of the advantage which a *free* trade offers, it being well understood that precautions are taken to prevent these islands from being made the medium of introducing contraband articles into other parts of the Provinces.

Mr. Adams, in his interesting paper upon these islands, mentioned in my third report, contrasts, humourously, the activity of the Magdalen fishermen, when the tocsin of wreck is sounded on their shores, with the torpor which they exhibit in following their daily avocations. Did no other causes exist for this difference, than the excitement which novelty affords, in opposition to the tedium induced by monotonous repletion, they would, perhaps, be sufficient to account for it; but a more substantial reason will be found in the cargo of some well freighted outward bound merchantman, which, stranded on the coast of Anticosti, or, perchance, *nearer* home, presents to these fishermen the opportunity of making some very *interesting observations*, upon the kind of food and raiment with which their more civilized brethren of Quebec are wont to clothe their bodies, both inside and out. In following this occupation, when chance places it in their way, these islanders have never been accused of a want of humanity; and the wrecker whose heart is alive to its dictates, is a valuable member of society, as his pursuits carry him often to the relief of the shipwrecked on desolate uninhabited coasts, where no friendly assistance could otherwise be expected. How different would have been the fate of the crew and passengers of the *Granicus*, had a vessel in the search after wrecks, fallen in with them; to have been accessory to their deliverance, would expiate a whole life of the *wrecker's* illegal appropriations. \*

It has been already observed, that the inhabitants of these islands are accused of a want of activity in their fisheries, and there appears to be too much reason to believe this is true; for, had they half the industry which their annual American guests display, they never would abandon to them the whole of the herring trade.

Quarrelsome and deceitful dispositions have been laid to their charge; the former shewn in the use of abusive language to one another, unaccompanied, however, by any more decided act of hostility; pugilism, being rare among them, as among the Canadians in general; the latter, in their transactions with the resident merchants and storekeepers.

Extravagance displayed in the use and consumption of articles above their means, is said to be another failing; one, however, which is common enough every where. Though abusive among themselves, they are allowed to be unassuming and polite to strangers—of sober habits in general, they allow themselves a little licence in this respect after a successful fishery in seals—they are poor without pauperism, and independent without pride.

Robbery, murder, and other capital offences, appear to be unknown on these islands; there being no record of the occurrence of any such crimes upon them.

Mr. Burnet, the Catholic Missionary, a gentleman highly respected on the islands, and to whom I am indebted for a memoir respecting them, which he politely drew up at my request, describes the manners of these people to be "doux et bien faisants, ils exercent volontiers l'hospitalité a l'égard des étrangers; ils ont de la religion,\* des mœurs purs, de la droiture et de la docilité a l'autorité† civile et religieuse."

I cannot presume myself to offer any opinion upon the manners and habits of these islanders, having seen so little of them, but what I did see, was of a very favorable description, and quite unexpected. I entered several of their houses, and found courtesy, contentment, cleanliness, and comfort, conspicuous. To the question, frequently put, "Avez vous de quoi vous plaindre," the same answer was always returned, "rien," accompanied by the characteristic shrugging up of the shoulders, which so perfectly indicates their origin. One individual, however, informed me, that he had the desire to abandon fishing in favor of farming, but that the uncertainty he was in, respecting his rights as a tenant to the land he occupied, prevented him, and his disappointment was considerable, when he found that the object of my visit was not connected with the survey of his and his neighbour's lands preparatory to giving them a deed

of occupation. Sir Isaac Coffin has been written to by his agent on this subject, who expects an answer from the Admiral, authorising him to make such surveys as appear to be necessary: this the inhabitants have a right to expect, and its execution is quite as conducive to the interests of the landlord as the tenant.

The religion of nine-tenths of the inhabitants is Roman Catholic, and two churches on the islands are consecrated to its religious observances; one is situated at Amherst Harbour, the other at House Harbour. They are visited by the Missionary alternately. In the present neglected state of these islands, this gentleman's influence is highly important, not only in a religious point of view, but civil also, and he appears to be every way worthy of the confidence reposed in him. It is thought that the introduction of school-masters on these islands would not meet with his encouragement; but such an opinion, as far as efficient men are concerned, is probably erroneous, for the necessity of establishing one or more schools here is obvious; and pressing it must be done, however, either by the Colonial Government or Proprietor, as the inhabitants are much too poor to do it effectually themselves.

There is no medical man on the islands, and, I am informed, no encouragement for one, the inhabitants being remarkably exempt from disease and sickness. Bouchette describes them as being "in general, remarkably hale and healthy, with light complexions and sandy hair;" he also adds, "they are cheerful in disposition, and the females particularly modest and ingenuous." My own observations, as far as they extend, confirm this.

There are clergy reserves on these islands, but no military ones.



## COMMERCE AND REVENUE.

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY 21ST DECEMBER, 1831.

No trade whatever, in the way of export, is carried on in the Magdalen Islands, in any article which is not the produce of the fisheries, with the exception of furs, skins, feathers, cranberries and red ochre; and the amount of these is very small. The great staples of these islands are cod-fish and its oil, the former either pickled or dried; but an uncertain fishery in seals is also pursued, the oil and skins of which form valuable items of commerce. Considerable shoals of herrings visit the islands in the spring; but they are not made, to any extent, an article of export by the residents, although the Americans and Nova Scotians carry off large quantities of them annually. About thirty years ago, an extensive business was pursued in oil obtained from the Walrus, commonly called the sea-cow or sea-horse; no other vestige, however, of this amphibious animal is now to be seen, except its long ivory tusks, which are sometimes thrown up upon the beach in stormy weather; their defection has been attributed to the indiscriminate slaughter which was formerly made of them, particularly of the females at the periods of their parturition.

The seal fishery is the first which engages the attention of the inhabitants upon the breaking up of the winter, and it is succeeded by the cod fishery, which continues until late in the autumn; the certainty of the latter gives it a decided advantage over the former. The furs and skins, seal skins and fox skins excepted, are not productions of the islands, but are brought from the coast of Labrador. Lobsters, crabs, and particularly mackerel, are abundant in the proper seasons, but are not made an article of trade. Besides answering as the occasional food of the inhabitants, the mackerel is made use of as a bait for the cod fish, as is also the molluscous animal which inhabits the clam-shell.\*

Very unsuccessful attempts were made on board the *King Fisher* to catch cod-fish, while she lay off these islands, in her trip; and had not the dried article on the shore, and the notoriety of the Magdalen Islands as a fishing station, proved the abundance of fish, we might very well have doubted the fact. We were afterwards informed, in explanation of the circumstance, that the fish leave the shallows towards the autumn and betake themselves to the deep waters, which are situated at greater distances from

---

\* Colonel Bouchette, who, in his recent work on Canada, has given us some information respecting these islands, describes a fish called a "fattan" as common to them, the length of which is about 3½ feet, and width 7 or 8 inches; this I am informed, is the halibut, and common throughout the Gulf.

the islands than the anchorage grounds of the vessels visiting them.

The imports, which are received in exchange for the staple commodities of the islands, are chiefly articles of consumption, tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, rum, molasses, &c. and fishing gear, brought in schooners of from 30 to 60 tons, owned by residents at Pictou, Halifax or Quebec. About twelve of these schooners trade with the islands. The number of vessels fitted out in the Magdalen Islands as traders is about twenty-seven, and ten of these are annually engaged in the fisheries on the Labrador coast, from whence they often return with their fish green, which they dry upon the beaches.

About the middle of April the first foreign fishing vessels begin to arrive,—in the month of May they are most numerous, and they cease to arrive in October or November. Those vessels which arrive first are owned chiefly by Americans, who pay 10 per cent. to some of the residents for the privilege and trouble of drying their fish upon the beaches and flakes; and who, in consideration of this, and perhaps, a little traffic, contraband or otherwise, welcome the return of these strangers, and are far from considering their presence as any injury to their interests. The American vessels are succeeded by others from the French settlements of Miquelon and St. Pierre, which become numerous in July and August; but even the visits of these, although their crews dry their fish on their own shores, and consequently, pay no per centage, appear to give little or no displeasure to many of the inhabitants; a traffic, similar to that above mentioned, and family alliances (most of the families on these islands having come originally from these French settlements, or from Acadia, with the families of which they often intermarry in the present day) may explain this.

That these strangers illegally interfere to a considerable extent with our Magdalen fisheries is unquestionable; and it is equally unquestionable, that such interference is politically, morally and commercially injurious to the many, although a few may be benefitted by it. It has been made the subject of complaint\* to the Assembly of Lower Canada; and in the Reports of the Committee for the year 1823, may be seen the information which was obtained on this subject, in particular, and on the interference of the Americans with the fisheries in the Colonies of British North America in general.†

Previously to visiting the Magdalen Islands, Mr. Ferrier, the Collector of Customs at the Port of Quebec, politely offered me the use of any information which his office might afford; and particularly directed my attention to two reports connected with a part of the duty I had to perform. These reports, one written by the late Sub-collector of the Magdalen Islands, Mr. Colbeck, the other by

Mr. Bruce, of the Custom House, have afforded me considerable assistance in framing my report, both as authorities, and by directing my enquiries; and I shall now introduce here some extracts from them, with the view of showing

\* For causes which have been assigned, the inhabitants generally do not appear to sympathize in this complaint.

† Mr. Brown, of Amherst island, says, that from 90 to 100 vessels visit the islands in the season, and much the greater portion of these come from American and French ports; and Mr. Colbeck states, that 1500 non-residents are engaged in these fisheries. When leaving these islands, we fell in off Bryon Island with four schooners from Miquelon, the crews of which, by their own account, had caught to the amount of 100 quintals of cod-fish per man, the whole probably from our fishing grounds.

the amount of exports, contrasting it at the same time with the information I received upon the spot from Mr. Cormier, one of the oldest resident merchants upon these islands, and the head of a large fishing establishment at Amherst Harbour.

MR. COLBECK.	MR. CORMIER.
This season (1830) the produce may be estimated nearly as follows:—	(Average annually.)
Seal oil and skins, . . . . . £4000 0 0	Seal oil, over 100 ton, at 2s. per gallon.—7 to 8000 seal skins, at 2s. per skin.
* 12000 quintals dry cod-fish at 12s. per quintal, . . . . . 7200 0 0	
1000 quintals green fish, at 10s. per quintal, . . . . . 500 0 0	From 8 to 9000 quintals of cod, at 10s. per quintal,—store price 14s.
Cod-fish oil, . . . . . 300 0 0	
Cranberries, . . . . . 90 0 0	30 to 40 ton cod oil, at 1s. 6d. per gallon.—1000 bushels of cranberries, at 3s. 6d. per bushel.
Furs and fox skins, . . . . . 250 0 0	
Feathers, . . . . . 150 0 0	
£12,490 0 0	

Besides the foregoing, which may be considered as disposed of for the benefit of the islanders, are the following items, in the profits of which they do not appear to participate,

1000 barrels of herring, caught by vessels from and belonging to the Bay of Fundy, at 10s. per barrel, . . . . .	£500 0 0
14,000 barrels of herrings, caught by American vessels, at 10s. per barrel, . . . . .	7000 0 0
	£7500 0 0

The whole amount of exports from the Magdalen Islands Mr. Colbeck computes to be a little under £20,000 currency. Mr. Cormier considers it to be between 10 and

\* Colonel Bouchette states the quantity of cod-fish caught annually at 300 quintals only, but this is obviously erroneous; he does not give, also, the amount of seals by at least one half, if the above statement be correct.

£12,000, but the latter does not include the herring fishery in his estimation, as the inhabitants are not engaged in it, consequently the two estimates nearly agree. Mr. Bruce, in confirmation, observes, that "the trade carried on at the Magdalen Islands may be taken a little under Mr. Colbeck's statement."

The reason assigned why the herring fishery experiences neglect, is because there are not more than a sufficiency of hands on the islands to attend to the other more profitable branches of the same business; but as this fishery occurs in the interim between the seal and cod fisheries, there is little doubt that the islanders might follow it to their advantage were they industrious, which, however, they are accused of not being. According to Mr. Bruce, there were no less than 65 American schooners in Amherst and House Harbours this spring (1831) engaged in the herring fishery, —their places would be well supplied by British vessels.

One of the subjects of complaint in the petition to His Excellency, which will be found at the end of this report, is, that the inhabitants of the Magdalen Islands have not received the same encouragement as foreign fishing vessels, including those from other British ports, which being in a more sea-worthy trim than those from these islands, are better capable of sustaining the rough weather which is met with, particularly in the autumn, and that, in consequence, they are enabled to keep the sea, when the latter are often obliged to seek a port, and thus lose much time. This advantage is attributed to the circumstance, that the owners of favored vessels receive encouragement, in the shape of a bounty in the first instance, and a reward subsequently, in proportion to the quantity of fish caught, from their respective governments, by which they are stimulated to greater exertion, and enabled to build better vessels for the trade.

An order has been recently issued by the Board of Customs, highly favorable to the fishing interests of these islands. By this order, which has been recently confirmed by Act of Parliament, they are allowed to receive flour and salted provisions from the warehouse at Quebec, duty free; and Mr. Bruce, and other gentlemen of commercial authority, think if the same order extended to all articles necessary for the fishermen, as is the case in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, it would prove still more beneficial in its effects.

No direct trade is as yet carried on with the West Indies, although there the produce of these islands is in much demand. Of West India merchandize is consumed, annually, here, about 50 puncheons of rum, 50 puncheons of molasses, 25 barrels of sugar, and 20 barrels of coffee; the whole of which comes principally by way of Quebec, Halifax and Pictou.

There are six stores on the Magdalen Islands, three at Amherst Island, and three at House Harbour. Articles of consumption are sold within them, at least 20 per cent. above their cost at Quebec. It has been thought that these articles are disposed of to the inhabitants at too high a price; but it should be considered, that the storekeeper advances his goods at considerable risk (and without the power of enforcing payment for them) to a needy, and often *unconscionable* debtor, nor is the former at liberty to withhold fresh supplies from the latter, because in that case his family might be reduced to the greatest distress, depending upon him probably for the means of subsistence. It is often the mortification of the storekeeper to see the labours of the fisherman, whom he has supported through a long winter, carried to the Americans and French at the opening of the navigation. Be it also remembered, that to leave prices to the result of competition is, in general, a sound commercial axiom.

There are only two, or at most three, extensive fishing establishments on these islands; one belongs to Mr. Cormier, of Amherst Island; another to Mr. Muncey, of House Harbour, whose winter residence is at Halifax; the third belongs to an American or Americans.

Mr. Cormier, to whom I am indebted for much information on this subject and others connected with these islands, informs me that the fish are on the decrease, while the number of fishermen is increasing: the latter, however, is no proof of the former. Colonel Bouchette says, that these fisheries were described in 1821 to have been reduced to one-third of what they were fifteen or sixteen years before that period. It is thought that the French injure the fisheries much by throwing overboard, upon the fishing grounds, the heads and offals of the fish.\* A good day's fishing at the present period, yields from 1500 to 2000 fish per schooner. The proportion of fish to oil is 100 quintals of the former to 60 gallons of the latter: one seal yields upon an average four gallons of oil.† The salt necessary for preserving the fish is obtained from Quebec, at the rate

---

\* It is not supposed that by doing so the fish are driven from their grounds by any sympathy in their nature for their species, or by their dread of a "raw head and bloody bones;" but the feeding on their own kind it is imagined that a species of atrophy is induced, which first reduces them to a skeleton and then destroys: it is also said that they choke themselves with the heads.

† Bouchette says seven.

of 13s. per hogshead, and it is used in proportion of one bushel per quintal of fish. When prepared the fish and seal oil is distributed as follows: the cod-fish is carried for the most part to Quebec, Halifax, and New Brunswick; the herrings (a very inconsiderable quantity of these are disposed of by the inhabitants) to New Brunswick, and indirectly to the West Indies; while the seal and cod oil is sent to Quebec.

Besides the establishments mentioned, some of these fisheries are, according to Bouchette, conducted on shares, which are divided among five, six, or seven men, who are employed in one vessel.

The price of labour, according to Mr. Muncey, is usually paid in kind (specie being rare), at the rate of about seven quintals of fish\* per month, which is considered equivalent to nearly £5. Mr. Cormier says, however, that it varies from 3s. to 5s. per diem with food, which is much higher—it is evidently fluctuating.

The gypsum which occurs here in such abundance, is not made an article of trade by the residents, though vessels from Halifax remove it thither, where it sells at from 10s. to 11s. per ton. Red ochre of a very superior quality is also procured on these islands, from whence it is sent to Quebec.

As intimately connected with commerce, I now proceed to enter upon the subject of the revenue and evasion of its laws by the contraband traders. That smuggling has been and still is carried on to some extent in these islands, there appears to be little reason to question, although the fact of

---

\* A quintal of fish costs 14s. store price—13s. cash.

its present existence to an amount exceeding £50 a year is denied by some of the principal residents; but as they very candidly acknowledge having been engaged in it, we cannot expect perhaps that they would admit it to be extensive, even if it were so. Both Mr. Colbeck and Mr. Bruce have expressed themselves positively on the subject, and complaints against this smuggling and upon the incapacity of the former to check it, forms the almost exclusive matter of ten pages of his reports. Since my return to Quebec, I have been informed by a mercantile gentleman that its existence to a great extent, comparatively, was admitted in his presence by one of the parties concerned. Captain Rayside, on one occasion, by boarding a French and British schooner, prevented the smuggling at the moment of a quantity of rum, but there is no doubt that upon his departure, it was landed.

Could the revenue be collected, it is thought that it might amount to £300 currency per annum; the expence of collecting it, however, would greatly exceed that sum, the consideration of which has induced the collector to recommend that the situation of sub-collector at the Magdalen Islands, vacated by the death of Mr. Colbeck, should be abolished. No revenue was collected during the time this gentleman held the office, for want of the necessary assistance, nor does it appear that his receipts were ever equal to his salary. In his report he describes the smuggling trade carried on with the islands as considerable, not only in French and American bottoms, but also by vessels either from or to all the three Provinces, Lower Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia—even Quebec, that immaculate city, is implicated in his charge, and he believes “that thirty puncheons of rum, twenty-two of molasses, tea, tobacco, and other merchandise, to a considerable amount were smuggled into the Magdalen Islands in the summer of 1830.” Provisions, wine, brandy, coffee, cottons, shoes, &c. are among the articles introduced in this way, for which fish oil, and sometimes cash, are exchanged.

Mr. Bruce observes in his report, “upon the supplies received from Quebec the duty is already paid. The duties might be collected on that portion which is imported by the resident merchants trading to Halifax and Miramichi but it is very doubtful whether any at all could be obtained from the transient traders, and it appears next to impossible to prevent smuggling by the Americans and French fishermen without the aid of a large and expensive establishment;” and he further observes, that in the latter opinion he is supported by that of Capt. Walpole, of H. M. ship *Ranger*, an opinion, of the accuracy of which, any person will be convinced who casts his eye over Des Barres’ chart of these islands.

It has been suggested that a coast officer would have a better chance of collecting the revenue, and of carrying into effect generally, the navigation laws for the accommodation and advantage of the trade, than an individual acting in any other capacity, and at less expense. The appearance of an armed vessel upon the coast is said to have a very beneficial effect, in many respects; and the same fear, which is said to induce many of the islanders to discharge their debts upon the approach of the *King Fisher*, would probably induce them in a great measure to desist from smuggling, were an officer afloat round the islands constantly.

I cannot better conclude this report, perhaps, than by introducing the following statement of those advantages

which, possessed by all others of His Majesty's subjects similarly situated, are as yet denied to those of the Magdalen Islands, and which to grant, will be to introduce a memorable and important epoch in their history, the favorable results of which would not be long in shewing themselves—these advantages are:

- 1st. The establishment of schools.
- 2d. The wholesome exercise of the laws.
- 3d. The encouragement of the fisheries.

All of which are set forth in the petition to His Excellency before alluded to, with a copy of which I now terminate this report. \*

---

\* It may be considered somewhat surprising that the petition does not contain a word of complaint against the interference with the Magdalen fisheries by the Americans and French; the fact is, it is not felt generally by the inhabitants as a grievance, the reason of which has been given. The petition should also have contained some allusion to the uncertainty of tenure on the islands at present, with the view to get it removed; because there appears still to exist a doubt as to the right of Sir Isaac Coffin to the islands, and consequently of his agent, Mr. Doucet, to grant land upon them. For although we understand that judgments have been lately given in favor of Sir Isaac's claims, they are not considered by the other party as deciding the question. This doubt should be removed as soon as possible, either in favor of one side or the other, as its existence has an injurious tendency, by inducing the inhabitants to neglect properties in the possession of which they do not hold themselves to be secure, as well as by preventing individuals from making a permanent settlement upon the islands.

---

*To His Excellency Matthew Lord Aylmer, K. C. B. Captain General and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in British North America, Governor of Lower Canada and its Dependencies, &c.*

The Petition of the Merchants and principal Inhabitants of the Magdalen Islands, most humbly sheweth,

That your Excellency's Petitioners, in consequence of their being so remote from the seat of Government, feel to a great extent the want of a proper system of jurisdiction upon these islands, and beg leave to state that, although the trade of one year alone amounts to about ten thousand pounds, yet, in consequence of the said want, there is so little confidence in all mercantile transactions, and so much difficulty in the collection of debts, that it does not exceed one half of what it might amount to under proper protection, and your Excellency's Petitioners are convinced that, unless the Government be pleased to take their case into consideration, and direct such measures to be taken as may secure the interest of all concerned, no improvement can take place in this way.

Another want under which your Excellency's Petitioners labour is that of common schools; for although a few persons have paid teachers, yet the sum so raised has never been sufficient to support a competent person, and in consequence they are now without one of the greatest advantages which it would be possible for them to enjoy.

Your Excellency's Petitioners beg leave further humbly to state that, in consequence of the local position of the Magdalen Islands, they are most advantageously situated for prosecuting a very extensive fishery, yet, with surprise, they observe that vessels owned in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and even in the United States, St. Pierre and Miquelon, although not better manned, make better fares on the same grounds than the vessels owned in these islands, and attribute this to the encouragement which they receive from their respective Governments, which enables them to fit out their vessels superior to those of these islands, by means of which they are able to remain engaged, when the said vessels are obliged to retire to a harbour, and thus lose in the course of a season a considerable quantity of fish, and this, together with other circumstances, tends very much to depress the spirits of the fishermen, than which nothing can be more injurious to the interests of these islands.



Your Petitioners would, therefore, most humbly pray that your Excellency would be pleased to take their case into consideration, and direct such steps to be taken as your Lordship in your goodness may think proper and best calculated to relieve their necessities, and your Excellency's Petitioners' as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

Here follow fifty-four signatures or marks, as many as could be conveniently collected in the time.

\* As these observations form only a small portion of a series undertaken recently by order of the Admiral on the Halifax station, to determine accurately the position of several ports, &c. between that place and Quebec, they may be relied upon. They are somewhat at variance with Des Barres' charts, published in 1778; but, when we consider the improvement of astronomical instruments since that period, and particularly the introduction of the chronometer into all correct operations of this nature—that test of their accuracy and of most calculations founded upon them—we shall be rather disposed to commend its approach to correctness than to condemn its departure from it. The magnetic variation on these islands was made by Des Barres in 1778,  $17^{\circ} 45'$  west; in 1829, Mr. Jones determined it to be  $22^{\circ} 25'$  west; the increase westward since the former period is therefore  $4^{\circ} 40'$ .