

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE 1909 FISHERMEN'S RIOT

Sensational Occurrence at Fox River
on the Gaspé Coast.

KEN ANNETT



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FOREWORD

It was one of the superb September days that Gaspé can enjoy in early autumn. Having stayed overnight at Ste. Anne des Monts, my wife and I had driven leisurely along the incomparably scenic road, intending to stop at Fox River for lunch. Having been born and raised on the south shore of Gaspé Bay's North-West Arm I had visited Fox River often from boyhood years when the short-cut road from St. Majorique to the St. Lawrence shore at Fox was a challenge to the motorists of the time. Now, as we drove along the familiar streets of the enlarged town and along the Barachois where the Fox River meets the sea, the contrast of the old fishery sites with the modern harbour facilities and fish plants was striking. At lunch in the Caribou Motel, on the site of the former Fruing Company fishery station, my thoughts turned to the era of my maternal grandfather, Charles Brien, and the drama of the events he experienced as district manager of the Fruing Company in the fishermen's riot of 1909. In recall, consider the following front-page news from the Quebec "CHRONICLE" of Saturday, September 11th., 1909.

" GASPE FISHERMEN MAKE RIOT

Sensational Occurrence at Fox River on the

Gaspé Coast

MERCHANT OFFER REFUSED

Fishermen Attempt to Drive Them From the Town

Government Aid Asked for to Quell Disturbance

THE TEXT

Fame Point, Que. Sept. 10. On Saturday last a riot was started among the fishermen at Fox River. The merchants of this place were

TEXT "offering three dollars and fifty cents per quintal for fish. (ctd.) The fishermen, however, were not satisfied with this figure and demanded four dollars per quintal. As the standard price of the fish had been set at three dollars and fifty cents per quintal the merchants were inflexible. The fishermen, seeing that the merchants were determined on the price offered, thought by using threats to compel the merchants to give them their price. Finding that threats were of no avail, they banded themselves together and on Monday morning nearly seven hundred fishermen had collected on the streets of Fox River determined on getting the figure asked for, or clearing the merchants out of the town.

They first collected in front of the Fruing and Company store (1) and by force hauled Mr. Carrel (2), Fruing's agent there, from his dwelling. After illusing him both by kicking and otherwise, they produced a rope with which they said they would hang him if he refused to accede to their terms, which he refused to do. Finding they could not by threats bring him to their terms they gave him a few hours to leave the place. This he was compelled to do.

They went next to William Hyman and Son's store and carried on in a similiar manner. Mr. Romeril, Hyman and Son's head man, there being the victim but in this case their actions were brutal. They would undoubtedly have made short work of Romeril had he been unarmed, but drawing his revolver, he emptied the contents among them, wounding one man (3) in the leg. This was something they had not counted on and were for a time abashed, giving Romeril time to escape.

For the sake of safety the merchants and their clerks, Hyman and Son, Fruing and Company, Charles Robin Collas and Company and Kennsdy were compelled to flee to Gaspé. Mr. Brien (4) head of

TEXT "the Fruing Company interests in Gaspé County, was notified (ctd.) and came to Fox River to see if he could bring the rioters to terms, but they gave him no quarter. On entering the town several armed fishermen seized his horse and, placing the muzzles of their rifles at his head, informed him that unless he signed a contract they had drawn up, clearing them from back debts and promising to pay four dollars per quintal for their fish, also several other demands, they would blow his brains out. Several other persons were molested and some seriously hurt, but no lives taken.

On Wednesday the Government cruiser, "CHRISTINE," was dispatched to Fox River to settle the dispute but the fishermen coldly informed the Captain that if he laid hands on a single person he would find himself in a serious position. The Captain, not being in a position to enforce the law, was compelled to leave. On Wednesday the merchants were advised that unless they came to the fishermen's terms their property would suffer, some of the fishermen threatening to burn the houses and stores. Up to the present however (5) no steps have been taken to do so.

Assistance has been petitioned and the Canadian Government Ship, "CANADA" is now on its way here, and it is hoped order will soon be restored. "

- (1) In today's town of Fox River, the AUBERGE CARIBOU MOTEL is on the former site of the Fruing and Company fishery station.
- (2) Charles Vincent Carrel (1870-1939) was a member of the Huguenot Carrel (Carrell) family of Jersey, C.I. He was buried in the cemetery of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Gaspé Basin.

TEXT (3) Mme Augustine Jalbert-Côté in her article, LA RÉVOLTE
NOTES DE 1909 À RIVIÈRE-AU-RENARD, records that the name of
 the fisherman shot in the leg was Urbain Chrétien of Petit-Cap. Her
 account of the circumstances of the shooting differ, however, from
 that published in the Quebec CHRONICLE of September, 1909.

(4) Charles M. Brien (1868-1933), my maternal grand-father,
 was born in Jersey, C.I. and came to Canada in the employ of the Fruing
 Co. at age sixteen. At the time of the 1909 riots in Fox River he was
 the District Manager of the Fruing Co. for the County of Gaspé and
 resident at Gaspé Harbour.

(5) Press time for the Quebec CHRONICLE of September 11th.,
 1909.

OTHER * Dr. John Mason Clarke, commenting on the Fox River riots
ACCOUNTS of 1909 wrote in his "HEART OF GASPE";

"...it was here that in 1909 occurred the first "strike"
 in the history of the fishing business in all Gaspé. In this extra-
 ordinary outburst, which would have been inconceivable under the drastic
 rule of the early fishing establishments, the men, convinced that the
 merchants had cut the price of fish too low, and roused by certain
 wild spirits from farther up the river, roughly mobbed themselves togeth-
 er to the number of some five hundred, broke out into an actual riot of
 protest, attacking the managers of the fishing stores, threatening fire
 and bloodshed on the companies and indeed so derious an aspect did the
 affair assume that the government at once dispatched its cruisers,
 CANADA and CHRISTINE to the place where a strong force of marines landed
 and took above twenty prisoners.

...The unsophisticated fisherman had heard of strikes from reading
 the "SOLEIL" or "L'EVENEMENT" and thought that here lay his remedy,

OTHER but the unorganized throng was arrayed against a
ACCOUNTS business which, next to the Hudson Bay Fur Co. was the
(ctd) oldest and most conservative and perfectly organized
 business on this hemisphere. To it, a remonstrance of
 this kind from its workmen was the rankest modernism and such an
 outbreak is not likely soon to be repeated..."

*Blodwen Davies, in her book, "GASPÉ -Land of History
 and Romance", wrote in part:

"Fox River is celebrated as the scene of the only
 fishermen's strike. One of the sons of the town ventured off to the
 United States to seek his fortune and was caught in the toils of
 industrial life. He learned about strikes. Eventually he came home,
 the travelled hero of the town, and told the fishermen they were
 fools to work so hard for so little. True, the fish merchants were
 omnipotent and the fishermen and their families felt the pinch of
 perpetual poverty. But the travelled one told them that all they had
 to do was to strike and the merchants, awed by the show of force, would
 give them all they demanded ...a strike seemed an excellent idea.
 Things were very bad. (The fishermen) were short of food and certainly
 action of some kind was imperative. Desperate men will listen to
 desperate and even foolish counsel. So all unprepared the fishermen
 struck for better returns. They plundered the stores and did a lot of
 property damage as angry and unorganized men will do. Presently two
 Canadian cruisers appeared and landed troops to take the situation
 in hand...twenty of the ringleaders were arrested, convicted and
 sentenced to jail terms. It was to be thirty more years before the
 fishermen of Gaspé organized co-operatively to protect their own
 interests..."

OTHER
ACCOUNTS
(ctd)

- * The article by Mme Augustine Jalbert-Côté, "La Révolte de 1909 à Rivière-au-Renard" published in the REVUE D'HISTOIRE DE LA GASPÉSIE, has other interesting data on the events of 1909. These include:
- (1) The 1909 riots might be likened to the eruption of a volcano resulting from pressures that had been building up within the mountain for years to finally reach a point of crisis.
 - (2) The fishermen involved came from the extended district of L'Anse-à-Valleau to L'Anse-à-Fougère.
 - (3) Prior to the riots the fishermen had sent a delegate to Halifax to seek an alternative market for their cod. An agreement had been reached with Halifax merchants but when their ship arrived at Fox River the Captain was ordered away by the local merchants.
 - (4) When Government troops arrived they were landed in the area of Fame Point and moved eastward on a sweep of the fishing villages and woodlands where some rioters had fled. This invasion was a traumatic experience for these fishing villages.
 - (5) The efforts of local priests and the support of the Banque Canadienne Nationale were credited in the subsequent development of other markets in Great Britain and Italy.

FISHING STATIONS AFFECTED BY 1909 RIOTS

Manorama of Rivière aux Renards from the East, Manorama de la Rivière aux Renards de l'est, Gaspé, P.Q.—H.H. 234



The Fishing village of Chloridorme from the West.—Le village de pêche de Chloridorme de l'ouest, E.L. 22.



PANORAMA, ST. MAURICE L'EUCHORIE, GASPÉ, P.Q.





CHARLES M. BRIEN, 1868-1933

As Manager of the Fruing Company for Gaspé County he sought to negotiate with the Fox River fishermen rioters, but in vain.

A RELEVANT NOTE ON THE FRUING COMPANY - ONE OF THE FISHERY
FIRMS INVOLVED IN THE 1909 FISHERMEN'S RIOTS.

Information kindly provided by the late Mrs.Ivy Dolbel Suddard.

My grandfather, Alfred William Dolbel, came out from Jersey at the age of seventeen in 1861 and served an apprenticeship in the fishery business.

Janvrin Company had started the business about 1798 and William Fruing Co. took over that business about 1857.

About 1873 my grandfather was made Manager of their establishment in Griffon Cove. He was there till 1880 when he was moved to Fox River. In 1884 he was moved to headquarters at Grande Grève to replace John M.Luce, who had died. My grandfather was in charge in Grande Grève until 1910.

Mr.Charles brien replaced my grandfather for a short time then Philip Luce took over until the company went out of business. Philip Luce, in later life, owned and managed THE CARIBOU INN at Fox River.

The Fruing Co.had outposts at Caraquet -Charles Brien, Manager; Shippegan - Mr.LeRiche; Blanc Sablon-Tom Morel.

Managers at the following places included:

Grande Grève - John M.Luce, Alfred W.Dolbel, Chas.Brien,Philip Luce.

Fox River - Alfred W.Dolbel, Elias Luce, Charles Carrel

Griffon Cove - Alfred W.Dolbel, Chas LeSelleur,Edwin Nicole, Phil Le Gresley, Fred. Romeril.

Chlorydorme - Mr.LeSelleur

Grand Valley- Phil.Hubert

Mont Louis - Nelson Laffoley

Little River,
Jersey Cove,
L'Anse à Louise,
Cap des Rosiers,

Summer stores at Grand Etang, Point Jaune, L'Anse à Valteau,