

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE DOUBLETS IN GASPÉ AND THE GULF  
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Recalling a pioneer mining effort  
at Grand Grève in Gaspé Bay of  
more than three hundred years ago.

Ken Annett

## THE DOUBLETS IN GASPE AND THE GULF

A previous article in the GASPE OF YESTERDAY series recalled the Denys family in Gaspesia and, in particular, the career of Nicolas Denys in Acadia and Gaspesia. Among the lands granted to Nicolas Denys by the King of France in 1652 were the Magdalen Islands. These islands, set amid the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, were a fine fishing base that attracted, among others, the early Basque fishermen and whalers. First used as a seasonal base, the Magdalens began to experience more permanent settlement in the later 17th century.

### THE GRANT TO DOUBLET

With apparent disregard for the prior grant to Nicolas Denys, the King of France, in January, 1663, accorded to Francois Doublet a grant of the Iles de la Madeleine and St. Jean Island (now P.E.I.) Doublet, an apothecary, was a son of Francois and Marguerite Auber Doublet of Honfleur. His need to support a growing family led him into maritime trade in partnership with a Dieppe ship-owner, Pierre Gellée, and the importation from New France of fish, whale-oil and furs. By 1662, Francois Doublet had become a ship-owner in his own right. In the following year, in partnership with Philippe Gaignard, he obtained the grant to the Magdalen and St. Jean Islands, and prepared to send his vessel, the SAINT-MICHEL and two other smaller craft to claim, settle and trade in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

### THE JOURNAL OF JEAN-FRANCOIS DOUBLET

We are indebted to the son of Francois Doublet, Jean-Francois, for an account of the Doublet experiences in Gaspé and the Gulf. In 1663, as a lad of seven years, Jean-Francois stowed away on his father's vessel and was discovered, much to his father's displeasure, only when the expedition was well out to sea. Later in his career, Jean-Francois Doublet would become a noted French privateer who would record his stirring, seafaring experiences in a manuscript JOURNAL DU CORSAIRE JEAN DOUBLET DE HONFLEUR, LIEUTENANT DE FREGATE SOUS LOUIS XIV. For generations the old manuscript lay unread in the Archives of Rouen until it was discovered in the 19th century by Charles Brèard, who edited and published it in 1883.

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The Journal revealed Jean Doublet as a freebooter whose stirring life put a thrill into every page of his remarkable diary.

#### FIRST DOUBLET EXPEDITION

Doublet's first expedition reached the Magdalen Islands in mid-May, 1663, to find some twenty Basques living on Brion Island. The Doublet crews proceeded to build dwellings and storehouses for those members that would winter on the island. The rest of the summer season was spent in fishing and acquiring furs through trade. With the onset of autumn the Doublet ships set out on the return voyage to France, leaving behind some twenty men as settlers.

#### SPRING, 1664 AND MYSTERY

On Doublet's return to the Magdalens in the following Spring he found to his consternation that all of the men that he had left to winter there had disappeared. The dwellings and storehouses, built the previous summer were deserted and in ruins. Faced thus with financial ruin he was obliged to return to France where he had to sell his ships to meet the demands of his creditors. What happened to the settlers during the previous winter on the Magdalens remained a mystery - one of many linked with these lonely islands in the Gulf.

#### TO GASPE IN 1665

To recoup his losses from the failure of his plans for settlement in the Magdalens, Francois Doublet found a position with the COMPAGNIE DES INDES OCCIDENTALES and, in 1665, was chosen to lead an expedition to the coasts of Gaspé where reports of a lead/silver mine, circulated from the time of early contacts of Europeans with the Micmac Indians, had come to France through the reports of the Intendant, Jean Talon, of New France. Workmen were recruited in Normandy, a mining engineer, the Sieur Vreiznic of Germany, engaged and the noted Dieppe sea captain, Captain Poulet, commissioned to transport the expedition commanded by Francois Doublet from Dieppe to Gaspé. Let us turn to the JOURNAL of Jean-Francois Doublet for a personal account of that summer in Gaspesia more than three hundred years ago:

Jean Doublet gives this account of the mining in Gaspé:

In the year 1665, my father was asked by the Company of Canada<sup>1</sup> if he would go to Quebec on one of our vessels which would fit out at Havre. in the capacity of a commissioner to mine for lead along the shores of the river St Lawrence where discoveries had recently been reported. They promised to furnish him seventy men for this purpose and also a German mining engineer and an interpreter, all at the expense of the company, and to provide in general all tools and provisions as well as the necessary ships. My father was to have 3000 francs a year and 4 per cent of the profits on the lead; the engineer to have 4000 francs; the interpreter 600; the workmen in proportion. My father accepted the position which he would not have done had it not been for his previous losses. When the ship was in the roadstead at Havre ready to sail, a boat came to carry my father to it, as he was all ready; and I plead so well that I prevailed on both him and my mother to let me go with him; so we were taken aboard the ship which was commanded by the celebrated Captain Poulet of Dieppe. We found the vessel extremely crowded by eighteen horses and two stallions from the King's stables. The hay for the sustenance of these filled up the whole place. Then between decks there were eighty respectable young women who were to be married on our arrival at Quebec; all these together with our seventy workmen made a veritable Noah's ark.

Our passage was pretty fair, although it took us three months and ten days to arrive at Quebec. M. de Tracy was viceroy, M. de Courcelles was governor, M. Talon was intendant, M. de la Chesnée-Auber was commissary general of the company. When my father had issued his orders a vessel of 70 or 80 tons was equipped to carry us with all our necessary things to the mines. On the 13th of August we arrived and disembarked at Gaspé and set to work on our lodges and furnaces. On the 28th we began to pierce into the rock on the south side where was the first discovery the native savages had made. These savages in making a fire for their kettles had used one of these rocks for a handiron (de chenet) and lead came out of it. This they found after their fire was extinguished and they took it to M. de la Chesnée who sent it to France. This it was that had occasioned our enterprise as it was thought that considerable of this metal might be found here as it is in England. On the 6th of September the said mine, after having been excavated 32 feet deep, was fired and we had two men killed and one named Doguet, of Rouen, had both his legs blown off, while three others were slightly wounded. This was their fault as they did not retire as far from the mine as they

<sup>1</sup> What is here meant is the "Compagnie de la Terre Ferme d' Amerique," reorganized by an edict of May 28, 1664, under the name "Compagnie des Indes Occidentales" (Brèard).

were ordered to. At a depth of two feet this mine promised well as we found there eight inches and four lines of face. But after we had reached a depth of 32 feet, it ended in nothing. This discouraged the Sieur Vreiznic, our engineer, who said that in all the mines he had excavated even of two or three lines at the surface, he had found at a depth of 20 feet more than a foot of face without counting the veins scattered in various places.

From the 15th to the 24th of September we worked on the north side. After having removed the earth from the rock we found at the surface five inches, one line; and after the mine was opened there were found only two inches. From the 27th of September to the 4th of October we worked on the east side without losses or wounds to our men. We had some hopes of succeeding better here, since we had found on the surface nine inches and three lines, but at a depth there was nothing at all. And that we might have nothing wherewith to reproach ourselves, on October 28th we tried the west side, where on the surface were only two and a half inches, and at 20 feet depth nothing.

The season obliged us to return to Québec as we had neither provisions nor lodging fitted to resist the great cold and snows; so we were forced to abandon our work which had yielded us no more than eight to nine thousand weight of lead. We took our departure on St Martin's day and on the same vessel that had brought us, and the mine had only made a hole in the purses of the miners.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A play on words: "La minne mina la bource des mineurs."

#### SUBSEQUENT DOUBLET CAREERS

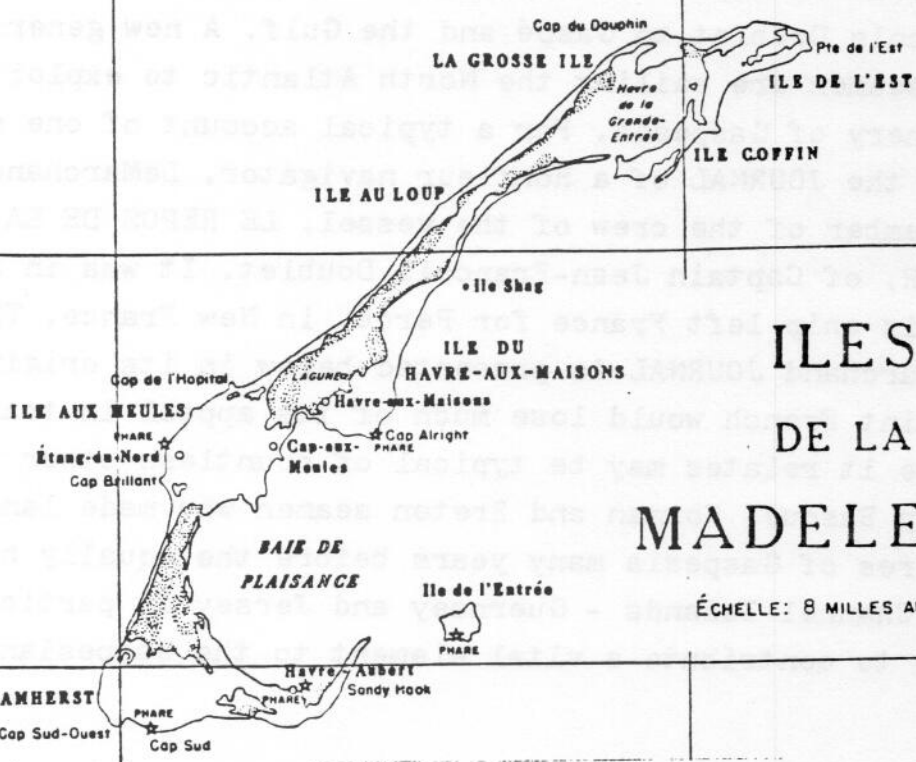
The Gaspé mine, the pioneer mining project of Gaspesia, failed to live up to the high hopes of its promoters in France and New France. Francois Doublet, with the authorization of the Marquis de Tracy turned his attention and efforts, "to trade in pelts along the coasts of Canada, Acadia, Newfoundland and elsewhere". An interesting sidelight of his stay in New France was that his son, Jean-Francois, was a student of the Jesuits in Québec.

On his return to France in 1668, Francois Doublet joined a company of merchant traders to the coasts of Africa and was associated with them until the end of his working days. His son, Jean-Francois, as noted above, made seafaring his career and left his descendants his remarkable and stirring JOURNAL. It is interesting to reflect that both father and son might recall and reminisce about their shared experiences in Gaspé and the Gulf.

45° 47'  
30'  
15' 47'

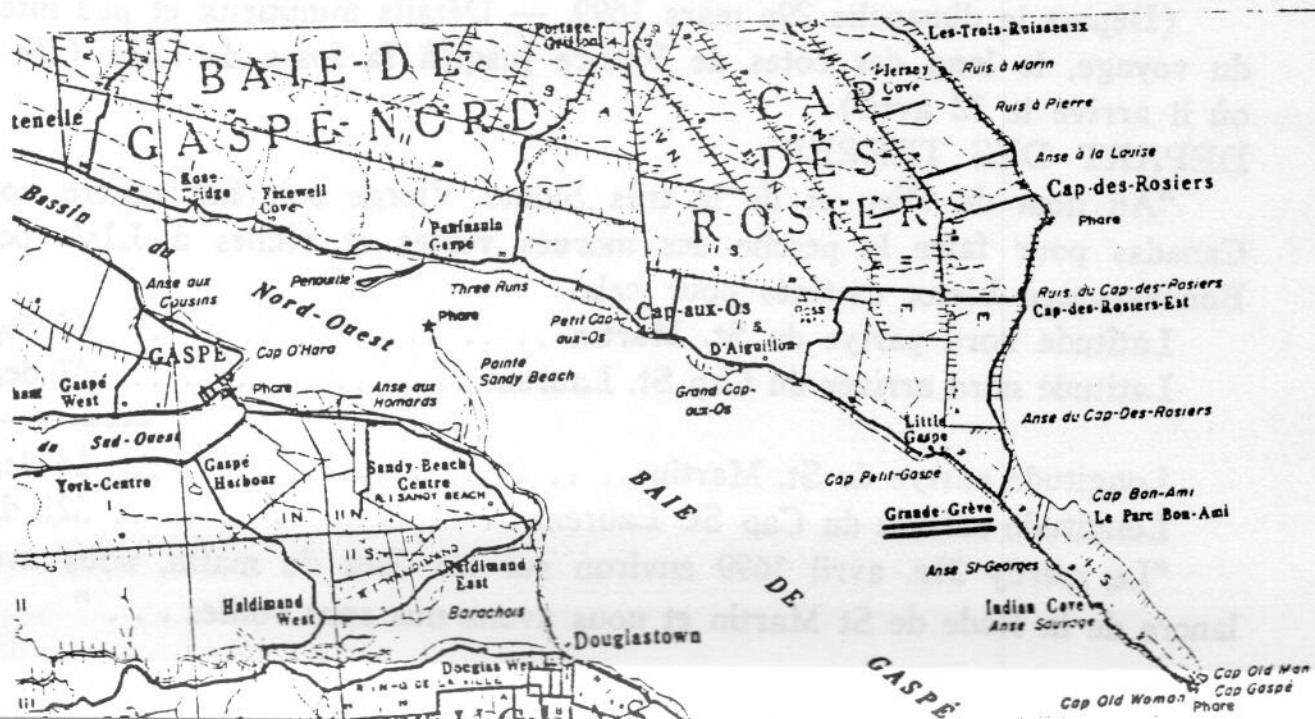
# GOLFE ST-LAURENT

Dandy Head  
PHARE Noddy Head  
**ILE BRION**



## THE DOUBLETS IN GASPE AND THE GULF

1663-1668



POSTSCRIPT

The year is 1699 - thirty years have passed since the voyages of Francois Doublet to Gaspé and the Gulf. A new generation of Norman seamen are sailing the North Atlantic to exploit the rich cod fishery of Gaspesia. For a typical account of one such voyage we have the JOURNAL of a Honfleur navigator, LeMarchand, who was a member of the crew of the vessel, LE REPOS DE LA PATRYE HONFLEUR, of Captain Jean-Francois Doublet. It was in March, 1699, that this ship left France for Percé, in New France. The text of the LeMarchand JOURNAL is presented below in its original form as its quaint French would lose much of its appeal in translation. The tale it relates may be typical of countless other voyages of hardy Basque, Norman and Breton seamen who made landfall on the shores of Gaspesia many years before the equally hardy seamen of the Channel Islands - Guernsey and Jersey in particular - arrived to contribute a vital element to the Gaspesian population.

**JOURNAL DU PILOTE LEMARCHAND**

"Au nom de Dieu et de la très Sainte Vierge soit fait le voyage de Canadas dans le navire nommé Le Repos de la Patrye d'Honfleur, commandé par le Sr Jean François Doublet armé de 10 pièces de Canon et de 80 hommes d'Equipage, après que nous aurons esté prendre nostre sel, ou il plaira aud Sr. Doublet.

(Départ le dimanche 29e mars 1699. — Détails minutieux et peu intéressants du voyage, le long des côtes de France jusqu'à la fosse de Loix (Ile de Ré) où il arrive le 12 avril).

**DEPART DES TERRES**

"Au nom de Dieu et de la très Sainte Vierge soit fait nostre voyage de Canadas pour faire la pesche des morues vertes et sèches à LIisle percée ou Bonnaventure Lieux destinés pour cela.

Latitude nord partye de St. Martin . . . . . 46 deg. 25 m.

Latitude nord arrivée du Cap St. Laurent . . . . . 47 deg.

Longitude partye de St. Martin . . . . . 16 deg. 35 m.

Longitude arrivée du Cap St. Laurent . . . . . 323 dg. 20

"Le mardy 21e. avril 1699 environ sur les 6hes du matin, nous avons levé lancre de la Rade de St Martin et nous avons mis sous voilles . . . "

(Depuis lors, chaque jour, de midy à midy, description des routes et fixation du point.)

Pris quelques morues dans la traversée du banc. — Rencontré forte glace.

Vu au passage le Cap de Ray, "l'île St Paul nous demeurait pour lors au O N O, elle se montre en forme de trois Isles que l'on croiroit séparées l'une de l'autre, et le Cap St Laurens entre le 0 1/4 N.O.

Le 31 mai approché de fort près île aux oiseaux.

### LUNDY 1er JUIN

"Tout le jour nous avons Louvoyé Bort sur Bort le travers de Lisle aux oiseaux . . . et sur les 4 heures après midy nous avons envoyé notre chaloupe à l'île qui a apporté sa charge de tangeux et de marmettes, et nos gens qui estoient dedans nous ont rapporté avoir vu tout autour de la dite Isle quantité de vaches marines qui estoient à terre sur les rochers.

Nous estions pour lors peut être à une lieue de la dite Ile au N E, nous y avons aussy pesché bien une centaine de Morues à 30 brasses deau fond de Rochers."

### MERCREDI 3e

. . . "Nous avons aperçu la terre, c'est à dire la table Rolland nous demeurait au N O 1/4 viron 10 à 12 L et comme il faisait calme nous avons envoyé nos charpentiers pour nous préparer des flottes pour flotter nos cables quand nous serions arrivés à l'île percée.

### JEUDY 4e

. . . "Nous sommes venus mouiller en myBaye proche et le travers du Cap Enragé.

Nous avons trouvé pour amiral à l'île percée le Sieur Vankerkowe commandant la thérèse de Bordeaux, avec le Capne Sanson et le Capne paslier qui estoient aussy au dit lieu de Lisle percée.

Il y avait pour amiral à Bonnaventure le Capne Bretagne et le Capne Clavery Basquet.

Voyant cela, nous nous sommes placés à l'île percée, et nous avons pris le dernier degat du Marest Vernier<sup>1</sup> "Le 24 de juin, le Capne herier est arrivé à Lisle percée et a fait son degat au Mont Jolly<sup>2</sup>.



## "DEPART DE LISLE PERCEE"

Retour "Octobre 1699" Le mercredi 7<sup>e</sup>

"Au nom de Dieu et de la très Sainte Vierge, soit fait nostre retour a honfleur.

"Nous sommes partis de Lisle percée le mercredi 7<sup>e</sup> octobre 1699, environ sur les 4 hes après Midy que nous avons levé lancre et mis sous voile d'un petit vent de N O & de NNO, nous avons passe par le NE, et a 9h. du soir Bonnaventure nous demeuroit au ONO environ 3 L . . . ."

. . . . .  
Peché près de 400 morues dans les parages des îles Brion

. . . . .  
Latitude partye de lisle St Paul . . . . . 47 deg.  
Longitude partye de lad. Isle . . . . . 321 deg. 20 m.  
. . . . .

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<sup>2</sup> *En marge*: Canada, le Repos de la Patrie. Cap<sup>e</sup> J. Fr. Doublet. 1699. C. 322.  
Extraits, en copie ou analyse, des Journaux de navigation des pilotes honfleurois allant à Terre Neuve ou au Canada faire la pêche des morues.

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<sup>1</sup> Marest Vernier. — Ce nom aurait-il été importé là-bas du Marais Vernier, vaste crique depuis longtemps colmatée, et terre de culture maraichère, entre Honfleur & Quillebeuf?

<sup>2</sup> Mont Jolly. — Le Mont Jolly ou Joli est un site réputé à l'est du plateau de Grâce, d'où la vue est splendide sur Honfleur et la baie de Seine. Nom transporté à Percée, très probablement par des marins honfleurois.

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