

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

---

BONAVENTURE

\*\*\*\*\*

Recalling some highlights  
of the founding and early  
days of Bonaventure - one  
of Gaspesia's earliest and  
most historic communities.

Ken Annett

BONAVENTURE  
\*\*\*\*\*

The name, BONAVENTURE, with long association in Gaspesia with a COUNTY, RIVER and COMMUNITY, is of interesting origin. In an earlier article of this GASPE OF YESTERDAY series the story of the Denys family was recalled. Simon Denys, Sieur de la Trinité, a brother of the better known Nicolas Denys, had a son, Simon-Pierre Denys de Bonaventure. It is his name, given first to the harbour at the mouth of the river Bonaventure, that has come down to us from the 17th century.

The career of Simon-Pierre Denys de Bonaventure was of such scope and interest to be worth a volume in itself. A companion-in-arms of the renowned Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, he was prominent in the long and bitter struggle between France and England for the control of Hudson Bay, Acadia, Newfoundland and New England in the late 17th century.

BONAVENTURE RIVER AND HARBOUR

The Bonaventure is one of the great rivers of Gaspesia flowing into Bay Chaleur. Its headwaters, far in the interior of the peninsula in the vicinity of the modern community of Murdochville, flow out of the mountains of the Gaspesian Park. The two, parallel branches of its upper course flow through the townships of Walbank, Maurier, Deville and Lebret to unite in Reboul township where the main stream is joined by the Reboul tributary. Following a sharp turn westward in Robidoux township the Bonaventure flows south-eastward across the township of Hamilton where, in the final stretch of its more than one hundred mile course, it forms the boundary between the townships of Hamilton and Cox. In its lower reaches it is joined by such tributary rivers as the Duval and Hall. Near its mouth the river is joined by the Cullen Brook that provided a site for one of the early grist mills of Bay Chaleur. The river mouth has long offered one of the few natural harbours on the Quebec side of Bay Chaleur. Well protected from wind and storm, with water deep enough to accommodate sailing ships of some tonnage and with a barachois offering effective protection and camouflage to small craft, Bonaventure harbour

recommended itself from early times to fishermen, traders and sea-borne refugees such as the dispossessed Acadians who were the founders of the community of Bonaventure.

### PERSPECTIVE OF EARLY SETTLEMENT

To gain perspective for the settlement of Bonaventure in the 1760's it is helpful to recall, briefly, some of the stirring events of the decade 1750-1760 in the Acadia-Bay Chaleur region. This period was marked by the culmination of long conflict between France and England for colonial supremacy in Acadia and the St. Lawrence. In 1750 British invasion of the Acadian lands of Beaubassin, a campaign in which a "scorched-earth" policy was applied by the forces of Major Lawrence, led to an exodus of Acadians to Ile St. Jean (P.E.I.), Cape Breton, Shediac, Cocagne and the Miramichi. In 1755 the French forts of Beausejour and Gaspereaux fell to the British. The loss of the strategic Chignecto Isthmus to the French sealed the fate of the Acadians and was followed by massive expulsion from Cumberland, Grand Pré, Pisquit and Port Royal. Some 1500 of these dispossessed Acadians managed to flee the round-up by British forces and made their way to Quebec and to Restigouche at the head of Bay Chaleur where a fortified French post had been established by Captain Bourdon.

In 1758 the great French fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton fell to British amphibious assault, dealing a mortal blow to French colonial hopes for Acadia and opening the St. Lawrence for attack on Quebec, the key to New France. After the surrender of Louisbourg, Colonel Lord Rollo occupied Ile St. Jean, which had served as a food supply base for Louisbourg, and displaced once again the Acadians who had taken refuge there. At the same time another British force under Admiral Sir Charles Hardy and Brigadier-General James Wolfe proceeded to Gaspé Bay and from there sacked and burnt French fishing posts from Miramichi and Mont Louis to Gaspé.

Quebec fell to General Wolfe in the autumn of 1759. In 1760 a French supply fleet bound for the relief of New France was intercepted by Royal Navy ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and

fled for refuge into Bay Chaleur with a squadron of the Royal Navy in hot pursuit. The BATTLE OF THE RESTIGOUCHE that ensued and which led to the destruction of the French supply ships at the head of Bay Chaleur has been recounted previously in this GASPE OF YESTERDAY series. Once again those Acadians who had clustered about the French base at Restigouche for refuge were displaced. It was out of the massive and painful displacement of the Acadians during this decade that the Bonaventure and other sites along Bay Chaleur received their early settlers.

#### EARLY SETTLEMENT AT BONAVENTURE

Though the Governor of New France, Count Frontenac, had granted the Seigniory of Bonaventure River to the Sieur de la Croix in 1697 with a frontage of two leagues on Bay Chaleur, there was little, if any, permanent settlement at Bonaventure until the 1760's. Among the first of the Acadians to settle there was Joseph Gauthier who had fled from Port Royal to Ile St. Jean only to be displaced again from that Island (P.E.I.) by the British occupation of 1758. Gauthier was one of the more fortunate Acadians in that he was the owner of a schooner in which he could transport his family to Bay Chaleur. There, at Restigouche, his brother-in-law, Captain Jean Francois Bourdon, Sieur Dombourg, commanded the French fort that served as a nucleus for Acadian refugees. When it appeared that Restigouche would not be spared from British attack, Captain Bourdon, fearing for the safety of his wife and children, had Joseph Gauthier take them, along with the members of the Gauthier families and others to some place of relative safety along the Bay Chaleur shore. Refuge was found in the harbour at the mouth of the Bonaventure river where their craft could be hidden away from the Royal Navy ships passing in Bay Chaleur. An assured food supply existed in the abundant fish from the Bay and River and forest game. Should a landing party of the enemy ships come ashore, the refugees could quickly take their women and children to safety higher up the river to well camouflaged places.

The reader who is interested in detail of the early settlement of such Acadian settlements in Bay Chaleur as Bonaventure will find a wealth of information in the voluminous writing of the eminent Gaspesian historian, Eona Arsenault. He holds that during the critical period of 1760 there was a concentration of Acadian refugees at Bonaventure and that it was only when the period of imminent danger had passed that some of these families ventured forth to establish themselves in other locations such as Traquadigaiche or Carleton. Among the more significant of the early arrivals at Bonaventure was Raymond Bourdages, a Master Surgeon of the Troop of Lieut. Charles de Boishébert on the River St. John. He became Bonaventure's first merchant and built one of Bay Chaleur's earliest grist mills on the Cullen Brook.

In an official return dated April 5, 1789, Joseph Arceneau, Captain of Militia, Pierre Morin, J.M. Bourdages and B. Bourdages certified that the following inhabitants had been occupying lands at Bonaventure since the year 1762:

#### SOUTH-EAST OF THE RIVER

Charles Poirier; Charles Bujol, Jr.; Pierre Poirier dit Parrot; Charles Bujol, Sr.; Francois Richard; Pierre Poirier; Jean-Baptiste Richard; Ambroise Eabin; Thomas Eabin and Esther LeBlanc, the Widow Bourdages and her children.

#### NORTH-WEST OF THE RIVER

Jean Arceneau, Sr.; Jean-Baptiste Lavache; Jean Bernard; Joseph Arceneau; Captain of Militia; Joseph Gauthier; Joseph Bourg; Isaac Bernard.

#### BONAVENTURE LAND TITLES - CONFUSION AND PROBLEMS

Given the sweeping changes following the British conquest of New France and the pressures upon the early Governors it is not surprising that the Acadians who had occupied lands at Bonaventure in distant Gaspé had problems in obtaining title to their property. We have the testimony of Joseph Arsenneau, Captain of Militia, that in the very year of Acadian settlement a delegation had been sent to Quebec to meet with the Governor, General Murray, to seek legal title to the lands they had occupied. Reporting on this meeting

to the second Lieutenant-Governor of the District of Gaspé, Colonel Francis Le Maistre, some 35 years later, Joseph Arseneau et al stated, in part:

"....Vos suppliants, mon Gouverneur, ne se sont pas établis avec imprudence sur les terres de la Couronne, en 1762. L'année de leur arrivée dans cet endroit ils firent les démarches d'aller a Québec demander a Son Excellence le Général Murray permission de s'établir, laquelle permission son Excellence leur accorda par une lettre de sa part en 1763...."

However, there were others interested in obtaining lands at Bonaventure, as witness the following Memorial of William Van Felson to Governor Lord Dorchester:

" THE MEMORIAL OF WILLIAM VAN FELSON

To the Right Honorable Guy Lord Dorchester, Captain General and Governor in Chief of the Colonies of Québec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and their Dependencies, etc.,etc., etc.

The Memorial of William Van Felson, of the Bay of Bonaventure, in the Bay of Chaleurs, in the district and Province of Québec. Humbly Sheweth that your memorialist, on the 25th of April, 1786, delivered a Memorial to Your Lordship in London, in which your memorialist set forth and pointed out several Hardships and Losses that he had met with and suffered in the Province of Québec since the year 1763, after the reduction of Louisbourg and the whole province of Canada. Your memorialist undertook, by General Murray's encouragement and by his license, as by his passport more fully appears, which gave full authority to your Memorialist to set up and carry on the cod, salmon and other fisheries in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Gaspé Bay, or Bay of Chaleurs, as also farther. Leave to the Memorialist to mark out and make a settlement on any tract of lands of His Majesty's property at Bonaventure Bay in the Bay of Chaleurs. That your Memorialist, at the same time, had the same promises from Colonel Willmouth in the presence of General Murray - Colonel Willmouth then on his

departure for Halifax to take Command of the Province of Nova Scotia, where the Colonel had known and been served by your Memorialist.

....Your Memorialist had the promises and assurance of both Governors that whenever your Memorialist did settle in this fishery and or making improvements on the lands, your Memorialist might depend and be sure of having the tract of lands granted as petitioned for, according to His Majesty's Proclamation and Orders, if they should fall either in Halifax or Québec government.

That in the fall of sixty three, your Memorialist embarked on board of his own vessel with a Cargoe (sic) for the fishery and part of cargoe he shipped on Board another vessel and landed the said cargoes at Bonaventure Bay in the Bay of Chaleurs, and there built a house, store and made other improvements for the fishery. That in March, 1764 received a packet from General Murray with a commission, instructions and orders at His Majesty's Proclamation of 1763 and further assurance for the land, whereas the north side of Chaleurs Bay then was declared to be and to belong to the Province of Québec.

That your Memorialist, in 1765, 20th January, presented to Governor James Murray and Council a petition and plan thereunto annexed for a tract of lands as in the said petition and plan thereunto annexed is set forth.

That on this 28th day of Fevr., 1765, the said petition and plan were taken into consideration by His Excellency, General Murray and Council, consisting of the Chief Justice and six other members of this Council, an order was then made on these words."

[ NOTE - An article entitled, "WILLIAM VAN FELSON - PIONEER MERCHANT AT BONAVENTURE" by Doris and David McDougall was published in SPEC , August 21, 1980.]

William Van Felson was not alone in claiming title to lands at Bonaventure. The Surveyor-General, Samuel Holland, testified that he had established his claim to lands there as early as 1765. Hugh Finlay, Canada's first Postmaster-General, stated that he held two hundred acres of land at Bonaventure since 1766 under the Great Seal of the Province and that he had paid the Patent Fees, Quit Rent and Sundry Expenses of his grant. Captain George Lawe, Sr. had been his Agent for the administration of his property. John Shoolbred also claimed land rights at Bonaventure under the LETTERS PATENT of 1788 over the signature of Lord Dorchester by which he was granted the Shoolbred Seigniory in Bay Chaleur. Twenty years prior to the grant of lands in Bay Chaleur to John Shoolbred, Peter Gregory and Jacob Stegman were shown as having been granted a total of 300 acres of land at Bonaventure. The references above, while not necessarily exhaustive, indicate the the land grant situation at Bonaventure was confused, to say the least, and such as to cause grave concern to the Acadian families who had occupied lands there from 1762 onwards and who wished to have clear title to their property.

#### THE EARLY ECONOMY OF BONAVENTURE

The economy of early Bonaventure was based on the abundant resources of the sea and river fisheries, the fine stands of pine and other timber along the Bonaventure and its tributaries and the crops produced in the fields reclaimed from the forest by the settlers. The harbour at the river mouth reflected the early economy. In 1767 the Jersey merchant, Charles Robin, was there and reported on the shipping at the time of his visit, as follows:

- . A ship of 300 tons, from London, to load masts.
- . A ship of 200 tons, from London, to load masts.
- . A brigantine of 80 tons loading fish for Spain and Gibraltar.
- . A brigantine of 100 tons, from Quebec, loading for the West Indies.

These four vessels, Robin noted, were consigned to Hugh Montgomery, an associate of the Quebec merchant, Alex. M'Kenzie. The masts, 70 feet in length and of prime red pine, had been cut upriver for the firm of Moore, Findlay and Montgomery. Some 1000 of them had been rafted down to the harbour for shipment.

In addition to the above vessels, Robin noted the following



vessels consigned to William Smith who had established himself at Bonaventure in 1766:

- . A brig of 40 tons loading fish for the West Indies.
- . A vessel of 120 tons loading 600 quintals of fish for Gibraltar.

When the schooners and fishing craft of the inhabitants and seasonal fisherfolk were added, the harbour of Bonaventure was a busy place in those post-conquest years.

#### RAIDING BY AMERICAN PRIVATEERS

As recounted in previous articles of "GASPE OF YESTERDAY", the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War brought a scourge of American privateers to Bay Chaleur and the shores of Gaspesia. Bonaventure did not escape the attention of these raiders. In 1776 the harbour and settlement was attacked, homes of the settlers destroyed and some of the inhabitants, including the Acadian merchant, Raymond Bourdages, carried off as prisoners. The losses of the Bourdages, Raymond and son, Louis, were estimated at more than £ 12,000. The injury of American raiding was compounded when the merchant firm of Holland, Collins and Finlay were granted some of the lands occupied by the Acadians, including Raymond Bourdages.

#### BONAVENTURE REFERENCES - COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

The early records of the Court of Common Pleas for the District of Gaspé have interesting references to some of the inhabitants of Bonaventure from 1789 onwards. This Court, which had jurisdiction in causes above Ten Pounds Sterling was presided over by the Judges, Charles Robin, Isaac Mann, Jr., and Felix O'Hara. From the beginning of Court hearing one of the prominent Plaintiffs was Henry Rimpfhoff, Esq., Merchant. A native of the City of Hanover in Germany where he was born in 1744, Rimpfhoff emigrated to Canada and located at the City of Quebec. He had wide business interests in Bay Chaleur and having some difficulty in collecting debts turned to the Court for relief. Among the Bonaventure men that appeared as Defendants in causes brought by Rimpfhoff were: JOSEPH HENRY CAILLOUIT; ALEXIS CORMIER; FRANCIS DUGAY; PETER HENRY; SIMON HENRY; JOHN CELESTIN; ISIDORE ROBICHEAU and others. Henry Rimpfhoff did not, by any means, win all the cases that he

brought before the Court. In some instances he was obliged to pay the Court costs. The records reveal the names of some of Rimp hoff's contemporary competitors. At Bonaventure the firm of L'EVESQUE and CURICHOD had a post where Peter Grise was agent. Richard Nevison was in business at Nouvelle and along the Bay Chaleur. Oliver O'Hara, a son of Felix O'Hara of Gaspé was the Deputy Collector of His Majesty's Customs and from his base at Carleton kept a sharp eye open for any violation of the Customs Act and Regulations. He was the Plaintiff in one of the more sensational cases before the Court in 1790- the seizure of the schooner "FOX" in Bonaventure harbour on the charge of operating under a counterfeit certificate of British Registry. The "FOX" case involved the laying of a charge against Azariah Pritchard, Sr., late Captain in the reduced Corps of Roger's Rangers, then resident at New Richmond. It was alleged that he had, "...knowingly and wilfully made use of a counterfeit certificate of British Registry...", a charge supported by a deposition of John Meyers, Samuel Moss and Warren Cook - who failed to appear at the trial. Captain Pritchard denied the whole charge and his case was heard by a Jury of his Gaspesian peers consisting of:

Robert Caldwell	Benjamin Hobson
Hugh Munroe	Volkert Sprung
John Caldwell	David Scott
Joseph Goodwillie	Ely Hawley
Alex. Brotherton	Isaac Montross
Benjamin Betts	Josiah Cass, Sr.

The trial, held on July 27, 1790, culminated at evening with the following verdict:

"...at five o'clock the above Jury brought in their Verdick (sic) by which the Defendant is acquitted of the charges alleged against him and dismissed by the Court, with costs to be paid by the Plaintiff." [O'Hara]

With respect to the fate of the schooner "FOX" and her absentee owners, she was condemned and ordered sold at Bonaventure harbour.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

The period during which the Acadian settlers at Bonaventure were deprived from the ministry of their Church was not as long as that for early Protestant settlers in Gaspesia. From 1760 to 1764 the services of the Church were provided by some of the senior members of the settlement, including Michel Caissy (Quessy), Joseph Gauthier, Sr., Pierre Poirier. As early as 1762 a Chapel was erected on the beach of Bonaventure harbour. In 1764 Father Bonaventure Charpentier came to minister to the settlers and remained until 1766. In 1772 the schooner of Joseph Gauthier, Sr. brought to Bonaventure Father de la Brosse. On board also was Raymond Bourdages who chose to settle at Bonaventure and become a leading citizen. The year 1772 was significant also for the ordination of the Abbé Mathurin Bourg to the priesthood. In 1773 he was appointed to the Mission of Gaspesia and Acadia and for the next twenty-three years served such Acadian settlements as Carleton and Bonaventure. A church was built at Bonaventure in 1796. Records of birth, marriage and burial of the early Acadian settlers thus existed long before such data were kept for Gaspesia's Protestant settlements, including the adjacent Loyalist settlement at New Carlisle. Such early records have been invaluable to historians of the Gaspesian Acadians. Conversely, the lack of early Protestant records continues to pose problems in tracing their early family history.

BRIEF NOTES ON EARLY BONAVENTURE SETTLERS

The brothers Joseph Arsenault, Captain of Militia, and Jean Arseneau, Sr., sons of Charles and Francoise Mirande Arsenault of Beaubassin. Joseph, born 1733, married Marguerite Bujold, and Jean, born 1735, married Elizabeth Bujold. Among the Acadian refugees at Restigouche in 1758.

Ambroise Babin, born 1731 at Grand Pre, son of Pierre and Madeleine Babin. Married c.1759, Anne Sire (Cyr). Their family included sons Thomas, Joseph, Amant and Pierre who married, respectively, daughters of the Richard, Poirier and Cormier families.

Joseph Bernard, born Beaubassin 1742, son of Jean-Baptiste and Cecile Gaudet Bernard. Married Marguerite Arsenault at Restigouche in 1759. Their sons included Jean-Marie, Michel, Louis and Isaac.

Joseph Bourque (Bourg) born 1733 at Beaubassin, son of Joseph and Anne Cormier. Married Catherine Comeau. Sons Joseph and Urbain.

Paul Bujold born c.1726 son of Charles, Sr., and Francoise. Brothers included Paul, husband of Marie Poirier, Charles, husband of Marguerite Cormier and Francois, husband of Marie Bernard. The Bujold family, refugees in P.E.I., were displaced again into Bay Chaleur following the surrender of Louisbourg.

Michel Caissy (Quessy) born at Beaubassin in 1714. A cousin of Joseph Arsenault, Captain of Militia. Married 1st Rosalie Comeau and 2nd Marguerite Henry. Refugee in P.E.I. then to Restigouche. Son, Michel Claude.

Joseph Gauthier, Sr., born 1717, son of Joseph Nicholas and Marie Alain Gauthier of Port Royal. Father was a rich merchant. At Beaubassin c.1744, P.E.I. 1752. A mariner who owned his own schooner. Son Joseph married Théotiste Landry.

Simon Henry originated in Cobequid (Truro, N.S.) and fled from there to P.E.I., then to Restigouche and Bonaventure.

Pierre Poirier born 1719 was the brother-in-law and a fellow mariner of Joseph Gauthier, Sr. His sons included Charles dit Commis, Pierre dit Parrot and Hilaire.

Pierre Poirier dit Chiche born Beaubassin 1744 lost his parents in his youth and accompanied his uncle, Pierre Poirier to Restigouche and Bonaventure. His wife was Marguerite LeBlanc.

#### SOME LATER ARRIVALS

Charlemagne Arbour, probably a son of the Pierre Arbour who was noted as living at Gaspé at the time of the Wolfe expedition of 1758. Thought to be a brother of Chrysostome Arbour of Percé.

Jean Boudreau born 1715 at Beaubassin. Fled to Cape Breton thence to Restigouche where he was taken prisoner by the British in 1760. Came to Bonaventure from St. Pierre de Miquelon. Later moved to New Richmond. A mariner and owner of his own schooner. He and his widow,

Francoise Arsenault were both well over the age of eighty years before they died and were buried at Bonaventure.

Raymond Bourdages born c.1728 was a Master Surgeon with the French forces commanded by Lieutenant Charles de Boishébert on the River St. John in 1755. There he married Esther LeBlanc. As French fortunes fell to British attack in Acadia the Bourdages made their way to Quebec where for some years they lived at Ancienne Lorette. A daughter, Charlotte and sons, Jean, Louis and Michel were born there. In 1772 Raymond Bourdages sailed to Bonaventure on the schooner of Joseph Gauthier, Sr., and decided to establish there. He became a merchant and operated a flour mill and a saw mill. With his son Louis, a mariner, he had a fishing post at Caraqueet on the far shore of Bay Chaleur. As noted earlier, the raids of American privateers played havoc with the business of the Bourdages. Raymond Bourdages was taken prisoner by the Americans and a decade later, in 1787, he died. It may be of interest that his son, Louis, qualified as a Notary Public, established himself at St. Denis-sur-Richelieu, represented Nicolet in the Quebec Legislative Assembly for many years and was an associate of Papineau and Lafontaine. By marriage the Bourdages were linked with the Quebec merchant family of Chinic.

Charles Cavanaugh born c.1766 was a Justice of the Peace and a prominent citizen of Bonaventure of his time. He drafted and signed a number of the petitions and letters by which the Acadian settlers of Bonaventure sought title to their lands.

Peter Cullen born c.1802 at Liverpool, England, came to Bonaventure by ship and remained. He married Marie Poirier, daughter of Charles Poirier, mariner and Angélique Arbour. Cullen became a Bonaventure merchant and the operator of the flour mill on Cullen's Brook - possibly as successor to the mill operated by Raymond Bourdages.

Joseph Dion is remembered as one of the earliest teachers at Bonaventure.

The brothers Jean-Baptiste and Isaac Ferlatte settled at Bonaventure shortly after 1800.

Other early settlers included - Jacques Briere; Gilles Cayouette; Charles Forest; Joseph Desilets; William Gallagher; J-B Lava; J-B Michel LePage; Francois Paquet; Antoine, Fabien and Xavier Roy.

RETROSPECT

More than two hundred years have gone by since settlement began at Bonaventure. The modern community, spreading far beyond the immediate environs of the harbour at the river mouth, bears witness to the tenacity and faith that descended from its founders. Many of the family names of the original settlers are still common in Bonaventure. There is justifiable pride in the community, its history and the accomplishments of its sons and daughters.

The story of Bonaventure is but one of the many strands in the rich tapestry that is the Gaspesian heritage.

