

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

EARLY SCHOOLS IN GASPESIA

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THE SOLE AND ENTIRE PURPOSE OF
EDUCATION..."

The Records of
Martin Sheppard, J.P.

KEN ANNETT

EARLY SCHOOLS IN GASPEGIA

A previous article of the series, GASPE OF YESTERDAY, recalled the long and dedicated career of Benjamin Hobson as a pioneer Gaspeian schoolmaster. His role as teacher of the children of the Loyalists had begun in the temporary camp at Machiche where the exiled and dispossessed Loyalists had found refuge before their move to New Carlisle on Bay Chaleur and continued long after. The high priority given to education by these Gaspeian pioneers, even while faced with the rebuilding of their homes and their shattered lives, reflected a deep and fundamental conviction that schooling was vital for their children's future. Such attitude and action for public education had not always been evident in Québec as a brief review of early educational policy and practice will indicate.

PUBLIC EDUCATION DURING THE FRENCH REGIME. 1608-1760

It would be hard to find a more accurate and compact account of public education in New France than that given in the 1963 REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON EDUCATION IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC. In Part One the Commissioners stated, in part:

Education in New France, as in old France during the same period, was a work of charity and, above all, the work of the Roman Catholic Church. Elementary instruction was given in a few village schools scattered over the rural regions, by itinerant school-masters, by some parish priests and, especially, by certain religious orders. Thus Jesuits, Sulpicians, Recollets, Ursulines, nuns of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, sisters of the Québec General Hospital, the Frères Hospitaliers all made it their business to establish and operate boarding and day schools, as well as less formal classes, both in the towns and in the country. With the support of the Bishop of Québec and despite countless hardships, these communities offered some elementary instruction at least to a portion of the people...

Throughout this period (1608-1760) there was no administrative body concerned with education. Although, in principle, no one might teach without the authorization of the intendent and the bishop, in practice educational authority belonged to the

Roman Catholic Church. Regular pastoral visits enabled the bishop or his delegate to keep informed as to what or was not taking place in the parishes, and he was vested with full authority to accept or reject the teacher's credentials. In general, whatever was undertaken by the clergy and religious orders received the support of the king, the governors and the intendents. Assistance from the temporal power was principally financial. Discretionary by the very nature of the circumstances, this aid was in the form of seigniorial grants, the exploitation of which could yield substantial revenues. Direct royal subsidies were often generous but irregular. THUS A TRADITION OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE BECAME FIRMLY ESTABLISHED, WITH THE CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CARRYING MOST OF THE BURDEN, BUT WITH OCCASIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT...

As Gaspesia remained far distant and isolated from the centers of French settlement in the St. Lawrence during this long period of one hundred and fifty years and as its population was chiefly seasonal because of its fisheries, it experienced little, if any, development of public education. It would not be until the settlement of the Acadians in the 1760's and that of the Loyalists and veteran soldiers in the 1780's that the first schools were established.

PUBLIC EDUCATION DURING THE EARLY ENGLISH REGIME. 1760-1841

For the first quarter of a century after the conquest of New France by the British little official attention was paid to education. The idea of a public school system was as far removed from English thinking as it had been from the French Colonial Office in Paris. Of this period the Royal Commissioners commented:

"...After New France was ceded to England, the British authorities allowed the Roman Catholic Church to continue to maintain its educational institutions. But their situation was far from secure. There were no more royal subsidies. Finding recruits for the clergy and the religious orders became difficult. Competent lay teachers were not available, and since, under the French regime, no representative public

body had backed the Church's efforts, the people were totally unaccustomed to organizing schools on their own initiative. They were, in fact, apathetic or indifferent. The existing institutions, the great majority of them in towns, were able to continue, but only in the face of enormous difficulties, and the country population was almost entirely deprived of schooling...

The English colonists were somewhat better off, because they lived principally in the towns. English and Scottish schoolmasters opened schools in Québec, Three Rivers and Montréal, which were even attended by French-speaking pupils. Yet the State extended very little help either to the English or the French-speaking colonists...

In a number of ways the War of the American Revolution had an influence on education in Québec. Not only did its conclusion end a threat that had hung over Canada for many years but it brought to Québec a flood of Loyalist families with different concepts and demands for public schools. As noted above, schoolmasters such as Benjamin Hobson, Josiah Cass and others taught schools in the Loyalist camps and the initiative to ensure continuing education of youth continued uninterrupted in subsequent permanent settlements. This "zeal for the advancement of learning", noted in the records of Martin Sheppard, J.P., was in marked contrast with the apathy and indifference noted in the French settlements by the Royal Commissioners.

It was in 1787 that the Québec Government took a first step to set up an educational system. A commission of inquiry on education was appointed by the Governor, Lord Dorchester, under the presidency of Chief Justice William Smith, a native of the former colony of New York. It was recommended that a free public school should be established in each parish, a secondary school in each county and a "common" university in Québec, from which the teaching of theology would be excluded. The whole system would have been under the direction of a body including the Roman Catholic and Anglican Bishops of Québec as well as equal numbers of laymen of both faiths. All the members of the Legislative Council supported the resolution, but the scheme came to nothing, because of the opposition it aroused both

within Québec and in England.

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

The establishment of a government system of free elementary schools was again proposed in 1801 by an Act creating the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning. This Act authorized the governor to appoint in each parish or county commissioners entrusted with the building and organization of schools. The governor was himself to appoint the masters and fix their salaries. He was also to appoint the trustees of the corporation, who were to be charged, on his behalf, with the regulation of the whole school system. The Roman Catholic clergy, seeing in this a threat of assimilation and an attempt to change the faith of their people, opposed the Royal Institution almost unanimously. Few of the parishes took advantage of the provision of the Act. The number of "Royal Schools" in such areas was not large, never exceeding twelve. Regions and townships with Protestant majorities, however, did put this legislation to good use, so that in 1829 there were no less than 84 royal schools in Lower Canada. It was to this Act that the following schools of Gaspesia related.

RECORDS OF MARTIN SHEPPARD, J.P.

30 AUGUST 1828

HENRY O'HARA AND CHARLES DAVIS ESQ., COMMISSIONERS

TO

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

Before Martin Sheppard at Gaspé Basin came Hugh O'Hara of Gaspé Basin and Charles Davis residing on the North West Arm, Commissioners duely elected and appointed and the Reverend Arthur Norman residing near Gaspé Basin, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Missionary, acting for, in the name of and on behalf of the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning.

The Act specifies that the Commissioners purchase lots for schools. Reference made to an Act between one, Benjamin Coffin, carpenter,

of the North West Arm of Gaspé Bay and Charles Davis and the Rev. John Suddard, Henry O'Hara and Charles Davis as Commissioners, passed before James Stewart, J.P., of Gaspé Basin.

Benjamin Coffin and Charles Davis did for £ 5 sell to the Rev. John Suddard, Henry O'Hara and Charles Davis as Commissioners, a piece of land for the erection of a school house.

Divers inhabitants did erect and build, at their own proper cost and expense, a school house with sufficient apartments for a school master.

A certain piece of land situate in that part of the North West Arm of Gaspé Bay commonly called Saw Mill Cove, beginning at a post planted on the land of the said Charles Davis, Esq., near a small brook or rivulet, which dries in summer, and running thence North two degrees East along the highroad 208 feet to another post planted on the land of Mr. Benjamin Coffin - thence North 88 degrees West 416 feet to another post and from thence South 88 degrees East to the first station or point of departure, together with the house erected on the said piece of land and intended as a schoolhouse for the purpose of education and the advancement of learning.

DONE AND PASSED AT GASPE BASIN AT THE RESIDENCE OF HENRY O'HARA,
30th AUGUST 1828.

[SIGNED]

J. STEWART, J.P.

ARTHUR NORMAN

FELIX STEWART, MERCHANT

HENRY O'HARA

BENJAMIN COFFIN

CHARLES DAVIS

On the same day in 1828 the same school commissioners proceeded to have a deed drawn for the following school lot on the South West Arm of Gaspé Bay:

A certain piece of land forming part of Lot No. 12 in the 1st concession of lots in the South West Arm of Gaspé Bay, containing 2 acres on a front of 1 acre, situate at the South West Arm beginning at a stone boundary planted near the land claimed by James Boyle and running thence North 32 degrees East magnetically 416 feet, thence North 47 degrees West 211 feet, thence South 32 degrees West 416

feet, thence to the first station or point of departure 511 feet, the said piece of land having been given and granted unto the said Commissioners by one, Abraham Joffin, the proprietor of the said lot No.12, for the establishment and erection of a free school.

[WITNESSES]

JAMES STEWART, J.F.

FELIX STEWART

BENJAMIN COFFIN OF THE NORTH WEST ARM

MALBAY,

15 SEPTEMBER 1828

JACOB PACKWOOD, POINT ST.PETER, YEOMAN

MICHAEL DUCKLEY, MALBAY, YEOMAN FISHERMAN

REV. ARTHUR NORMAN, SOUTH WEST ARM OF GASPE BAY, CLERK OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL

TO

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

Divers inhabitants of Malbay moved by zeal for the advancement of learning did build at their own proper cost and expense a school house for the sole and entire purpose of education.

ON

A certain piece of ground containing 1 square acre, part of lot No. 10, 1st concession of lots in Malbay, commencing at a fence planted on the said lot No. 10, according to the survey of Archibald McNeil, Esq., Sworn Land Surveyor, bounded in front by the King's Highway passing through the said lot and on each side and in the rear by the remaining portion of lot No. 10.

[WITNESSES]

PHILIP PERRÉE, POINT ST.PETER, MERCHANT

JOHN EDEN, SOUTH WEST ARM, GASPE BAY, SCHOOLMASTER.

HOPE

22nd. JULY 1828

FARQUHAR McRAE, GRAND VOYER
 DUNCAN McRAE, YEOMAN
 REV. WILLIAM ARNOLD, RESIDING NEAR NEW CARLISLE, CLERK
 OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL
 COMMISSIONERS ELECTED AND APPOINTED, ACTING FOR
 THEMSELVES AND IN THE NAME OF DAVID SMITH, ELDER
 AND WALTER ROSS

TO

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

Act of 1825 between Owen Powers of Hope (since deceased) Yeoman, and Farqhar McRae, Duncan McRae, David Smith, Elder, Walter Ross, passed before James Day, Esq., J.P., and witnessed by John De Caen and James Le Scelleur, sold land to the Commissioners whereupon divers inhabitants of Hope Township, moved by zeal for the advancement of learning and education did erect and build at their own proper costs and expenses, solely and entirely for a school house, with sufficient apartments for a schoolmaster.

This school transferred to the Royal Institution for the sum of 5 shillings, current money .

A certain lot or piece of land of 1 superficial square acre, part of Lot 9, 1st Concession, Township of Hope, acquired from Owen Powers. Bounded in front by the King's Highway, on the West by the lot held by Hector Ross and on the North and East by the remainder of lot 9. Together with the house erected and built for the purposes of education and the advancement of learning.

[WITNESSES] JAMES CRAWFORD
 WILLIAM FRUING

[SIGNED] FARQUHAR McRAE
 DUNCAN McRAE
 WILLIAM ARNOLD
 MARTIN SHAPPARD, N.P.

Text of Letter from Benjamin Hobson,
Pioneer Schoolmaster at New Carlisle
to the Secretary of the Royal Institu-
tion for the Advancement of Learning,
Rev. J.L.Mills, June 6, 1820.

McGill Univ. Archives

Rev. Sir,

I have the Honor of your Communication of 27 January last with the printed Queries which you submit to me for my answer respecting (sic) my School in New Carlisle and to which I now answer without any Delay

- 1st - I have held the appointment of Schoolmaster in New Carlisle for the space of thirty-five years, complete next July - I beg leave here to state that in the Character of a Loyalist I entered the Army of General Burgoyne then laying at Ticonderoga and was in all the different actions up to the Period of the Capitulation when I was sent into Canada with the other Loyalists, and the Provincial Government allowed me Lieutenant's pay for my Maintenance and Support, and upon getting to Quebec I opened a School, the Emoluments of which formed an addition to my above Income, and at the End of which time I went to Machiche and opened School for the Benefit of the Children of the Loyalists who were stationed there by Government, and continued there to be allowed Lieutenant's pay by Government but without any Salary in the name of Schoolmaster, and that during the whole time of my said teaching which was for five years. I charged no school wages but taught all my Scholars, Children of the Loyalists, gratis, and I have to state that the Scholars I taught of this discription during the above Period were from Sixty to Ninety in Number.

I further certify that for several years after my arrival in New Carlisle I had no Government allowance for being Schoolmaster, notwithstanding that the Lieutenant's pay which I formerly had was discontinued by the Provincial Government to me from the date of my said arrival here which was entirely an unexpected Circumstance to me.

- 2nd I was put upon the Salary of Schoolmaster of Twenty five pounds sterling by the Provincial Government about twenty nine years ago per annum, but about ten years ago the said Salary was raised to Fifty pounds Currency.
- 3rd I have kept my School in no other part of the District of Gaspé than at New Carlisle, the place chosen by Government in the Bay Chaleur for the Establishment of Loyalists and their Families.
- 4th For fourteen years in the beginning I kept school in my own House without any Allowance or Indemnification being made to me for Rent by the Inhabitants of New Carlisle and Neighbourhood, since which Time they have found me a School House.
- 5th I have taught the reading of the English Language , Orthography, and writing.
- 6th Dilworth's English Spelling Book and Grammer, the Old and New Testaments are the Books which have been used in my school.
- 7th I do not pursue any particular System of Education in my School, following what I have been led to by Experience to adopt as the best manner of other Schoolmasters instructing youth.
- 8th For the greater part of the above Time that I have taught I have had from about forty to Sixty Scholars, consisting of about an equal Number of Boys and Girls - I have taught many Gratis, as I never charged any thing for wages for more than two Scholars from one Family since I received my augmentation of Salary, and it has often happened that the number from one Family were three or four Scholars and sometimes

more, and with this exception I have charged two shillings and sixpence per month for every Scholar attending my School, but the payment of this wages has been for the most part in Labour, and some part in the produce of the Country, but I have to observe that what has never been paid in any manner whatever exceeding the half of what was really due from the inability of the Parents, so that I have had very little advantage in this way towards my living.

9th There are no Syndics, none having ever been appointed by Government.

From the above the Board of the Royal Institution will receive what I trust will be considered a full and particular answer to all the queries contained in your letter addressed to me of the above date and I would only beg leave to add that having been exposed to a good many Hardships and Dangers in his Majesty's Service while with the Army under General Burgoyne under the Character of a Loyalist, and having since my entering into Canada conducted a Government School as the Master for forty years, and now having actually attained the eighty third year of my age I trust that my Representation through you of these Circumstances will be favorably attended to by Government.

My present Exertions are as arduous as my age and Health can possibly admit of but I have found them unequal to attend on the Business of teaching during the inclement Months of Winter for some years past.

I should be happy to attend to any directions you may do me the honor to transmit to me.

I am Reverend Sir

with the greatest Respect
your obedient and very
Humble Servant

Benjamin Hobson

New Carlisle 6 June
1820

*Extract from Letter Recommending
Payment of a Pension to Schoolmaster
Benjamin Hobson of New Carlisle*

Castle of St. Lewis
Quebec 3rd December, 1822

The Reverend Mr. J.L. Mills
Secretary
The Royal Institution

Sir,

In answer to your letter of the 21st
ulto I am directed by His Excellency The
Governor in Chief to acquaint you for the
information of the Royal Institution that
upon their Recommendation and in considera-
tion of the great age of Mr. Hobson, the
School Master at New Carlisle His Excellency
approves of his receiving Thirty Pounds per
annum during his Life out of the Salary
allowed for the School and that the remaining
Twenty Pounds be given to Mr. McNish the person
in charge of the School. And I am further to
acquaint you that The Commission for the above
mentioned School, Recommended by the Board will
be appointed

I have the Honor to be
Sir
Your most obed. Servant

Andrew Wm. Cochran
Sec.