

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

JOHN LE MESURIER

1826 - 1881

John Le Mesurier

SUBMITTED BY KEN ANETT

Amongst the few who come to a comparatively large city from a remote country spot; with the proverbial half-crown in their pockets, and possessing nothing more than a clear head, a stout heart, and a perfect determination to overcome all the many difficulties on life's highway, to "get on" in the world, we claim for the subject of our sketch this deservedly commendable step. Mr. Le Mesurier's biography is no allegorical yarn, but a plain, simple, unvarnished account of his various steps upward from the lowest rung of the ladder. Certainly, he had -- and what business man has not? -- met with overwhelming disasters, financially and otherwise, in the course of his career, which would have crushed many a less steadfast and determined man. However, he passed triumphantly over all to reap and enjoy the well-earned reward of his labors in the city of his adoption. For in Quebec City no man stood higher "rated" amongst the banking community, with whom he did business, than John Le Mesurier.

Born at Gaspé on January 28th, 1826, the son of one of the old followers of Admiral Horatio Nelson, he began his career in the business of his father's establishment at Gaspé. His father, Charles Le Mesurier, came from the island of Jersey and his mother, Mary Thompson, from Country Londonderry, Ireland. Charles Le Mesurier served under the gallant Nelson for nine years and was present on board H.M. ship "VICTORY", with the grand old naval commander, when he fell at Trafalgar. With such an antecedent it is not surprising that his son, John, should be proud. It was said that, wearing the brave old blue jacket, Charles Le Mesurier had arrived in Quebec in 1821. Here he met with only one other who had served under the pennant with England's bravest and time-honoured naval commander.

At Gaspé John Le Mesurier was educated and in November, 1847, he sailed from Gaspé, on board the schooner, "ANTELOPE", for Québec,

but was wrecked while coming up the St. Lawrence. Returning again to Gaspé, nothing daunted, he embarked a second time, on board the "MARY", belonging to a Mr. Smith; and, for a second time, was wrecked in the Manicouagan shoals. He, with the others of the shipwrecked crew, after enduring great hardships and privations, walked over the snow and ice to Sault au Cauchon. With two others, he determined to remain there, the remainder of the crew proceeding to Québec. During that winter he worked in one of Mr. Price's establishments. In the following spring he crossed to the south shore, and made his way on foot to Québec, whence he returned to Gaspé, to follow the fishery business.

Eventually, he sailed again in a schooner for Québec, a voyage which took twenty-one days to accomplish. Once more arriving in Québec, he was engaged by a Mr. Withall, now vice-president of the Québec Bank, at a very small salary. In the second year, a trifling increase was made to his wages. Finally, Mr. Withall sold his business to young Le Mesurier, which proved successful.

However, being of an over-zealous temperament, he embarked in an oakum manufactory -- possibly with a desire to aid his brother -- which did not prove such a favorable investment as could be desired. But to instance that this did not render him unpopular among his brother merchants, we may remember that he was elected to the city council in 1859 and was subsequently in 1867 elected mayor of the City of Québec; having for his opponent the Hon. Joseph Cauchon, the then mayor and later the Governor of Manitoba; and, in the following year, as a further instance of his increasing favor with the citizens of Québec, he was re-elected by acclamation.

During the first year of his mayoralty, he delivered the Address of Welcome to H.R.H. Prince Arthur and had the honour of dining with His Royal Highness at a dinner given by Sir Narcisse Belleau,

K.C.M.G., at the Stadacona Club.

While he retained office as the chief magistrate of Québec, a riot broke out amongst laborers, and had it not been for his timely interposition and cool demeanor, notwithstanding that the troops were under arms, might have resulted in loss of life and blood-

shed. He was ordered to read the Riot Act, but this he positively refused to do, and with a courage and daring which many might envy, went into the midst of the rioters and by diplomatic sausion, induced them to disperse, and thus, after a few days, once more restored the usual tranquillity to its citizens.

In 1870, he opened a brewery and tannery, but finding both speculations far from satisfactory, he gave them up, and, in 1837, went into the tobacco manufacturing business, taking in his sons, William and Henry Le Masurier.

For a considerate portion of his life he took a lively interest in politics, using all his influence in behalf of the Liberal cause; but, having weighed the advantages which he considered must accrue to the country from Protection, became a staunch adherent, follower and supporter of the National Policy. At nearly all public meetings he was prominent and in many instances his addresses were listened to attentively by the French-Canadian portion of the community; at times when they closed their ears against others. He was a man generally held in good estimation by his fellow citizens of each nationality.

The home of John Le Mesurier and his wife, the former Miss Mary Sylvain, was blessed with a family of five children.

The death of John Le Mesurier occurred on June 21st, 1881, at the comparatively early age of fifty-five years. The funeral of this former son of Gaspé, who had risen by his own merits to become mayor and a distinguished citizen of Québec's capital city, was attended by representatives of the City and of all levels of the community that he had adopted as his home and served faithfully and well.