

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

WINDOWS THAT ENABLE US TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF THOSE WHO WERE VISITORS TO GASPEZIA IN TIMES LONG PAST AND HAVE LEFT US A PRICELESS HERITAGE OF THEIR IMPRESSIONS.

SUCH A WINDOW INTO THE PAST IS THAT PROVIDED BY THE TWO-VOLUME WORK OF JOHN M'GREGOR, PUBLISHED IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, IN 1833.

IN THE DECADE FOLLOWING THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO IN 1815, JOHN M'GREGOR TRAVELLED EXTENSIVELY IN BRITISH NORTH AMERICA AND WAS RESIDENT FOR A TIME.

HIS IMPRESSIONS OF GASPEZIA WERE REFLECTED IN THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS OF HIS BOOK.

KEN ANNETT

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

SOME EXTRACTS ON GASPEZIA FROM THE TWO-VOLUME WORK, "BRITISH AMERICA"
BY JOHN M'GREGOR, ESQ., PUBLISHED IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, IN 1833.

This work was dedicated*:

TO

HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY

WILLIAM THE FOURTH

SIRE, YOUR MAJESTY HAVING BEEN THE ONLY
BRITISH MONARCH WHO EVER VISITED THAT
INTERESTING PORTION OF THE EMPIRE WHICH
I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DESCRIBE, I WAS
EMBOLDENED TO SOLICIT YOUR MAJESTY'S
PATRONAGE FOR MY WORK. FOR THE GRACIOUS
MANNER IN WHICH PERMISSION WAS GRANTED ME
TO DEDICATE MY HUMBLE LABOURS TO YOUR
MAJESTY, I BEG TO OFFER MY VERY GRATEFUL
AND RESPECTFUL THANKS.

I HAVE THE HONOUR TO BE

SIRE

YOUR MAJESTY'S

VERY DUTIFUL AND VERY LOYAL SUBJECT

JOHN M'GREGOR

* Note- The visit referred to in the dedication above occurred in 1787 when the then Prince William Henry, a Captain of the Royal Navy and serving with the West Indian Squadron, visited Lower Canada. On the death of his father, King George III, Prince William succeeded to the throne of England as William IV. His daughter, in turn, was Queen Victoria. The tradition of visits of Royal Navy ships of the West Indian Squadron to Gaspesian waters and, in particular to Gaspé Bay, is long established.

BAY DE CHALEUR

This bay, or rather gulf, and the River Rustigouche which falls into it, divide Canada and New Brunswick, Cape Mackerel (Maquereau) on the Canadian side, and Point Miscou on the south, distant from each other fifteen miles, from the entrance to this bay...

The length of this magnificent gulf from Point Miscou west to the mouth of the River Rustigouche is about eighty-five miles. In one place it is twenty miles broad; in others from fifteen to thirty miles. On the Canadian or north side, the land rises into lofty mountains; on the south side, except within twenty miles of the head of the bay, the interior country is low.

In 1534 Jacques Cartier sailed into this bay, previous to his discovering the St;Lawrence. From the intensity of the midsummer heat which he then experienced he gave it the name of Bay de Chaleur.

Miscou Island is about ten miles round. Here the French, previous to the conquest of Canada, had an extensive fishing plantation, conducted by the "Company of Miscou". The remains of their buildings & still appear. In 1819 I landed on this island; there was living on it one family, consisting of a disbanded Highland soldier, of the name of Campbell, his wife, son-in-law, and two daughters *

* Note-(Three individuals of this family were, I have since learned, drowned; the boat in which they were attempting to cross to Caraquette having swamped on a reef about two miles from land. One of these was the unmarried daughter. Her appearance was certainly interesting when I saw her; and I could not help thinking, at that time, that it was a matter of regret that she should wear out life on an island thirty miles from anyone but her own family. A black servant, that I had with me, told me after we left, that she was anxious to escape from "her prison", as she named it. Two months after, the unfortunate girl was drowned.)

The River Rustigouche falls into a spacious harbour at the head of the Bay de Chaleur. This majestic river, and its numerous appendant streams, branch over more than six thousand miles of New Brunswick and Canada. The largest stream running into it from the north is the Matapedia, rising in a lake of that name, situated in the county of Cornwallis, in Lower Canada...A road, to open a direct communication between the settlements on the Bay de Chaleur and Canada by the lake Matapedia, has been contemplated...I consider a road that would enable the inhabitants of the Bay de Chaleur, particularly those on the north side, to have a direct and certain intercourse with Quebec, an object of the greatest importance.

The inhabitants at what may be considered the harbour of Rustigouche, and at Dalhousie on the New Brunswick side, where many of the timber ships load, and those at the settlements of Nouvelle, New Richmond, Tracadigash and Cascapedia consist of a mixed population of English, Scotch, Irish, Americans and Acadian French, who employ themselves in the different occupations of fishing, hewing timber and farming on a very humble scale.

Eighteen miles up the Rustigouche there is an Indian reserve of 1200 acres of rich land, on which the Micmacs have a chapel, and a small village of huts and wigwams, forming residences for about 200 persons, who are considered residents; but for many of them it is only a rendezvous, where they assemble for a few weeks; and then, displacing and packing up their portable habitations, and whatever else they possess, embark in their canoes for some other part of the country. There are about twenty families who are permanent residents, and own some oxen, cows, and pigs, a few fishing boats and a shallop, besides their canoes. They raise some maize, potatoes &c.

There are three or four timber merchants at and near Rustigouche, who have exported several cargoes of timber during the last few years. Besides the quantity of salmon used by the inhabitants and lumbering parties, a great

share of the salmon caught in this river is sold to the traders who export the same to Quebec, Halifax, or direct to the West Indies.

BONAVENTURE AND CARLISLE

The River of Bonaventure, on the north side of the bay, is about fifty miles below Rustigouche. It rises in a fine lake about forty miles in the interior and flows rapidly through a richly wooded country to its débouché, where there is a small harbour, which at high water will admit brigs of two hundred tons; and on each side of which there is a thickly-settled population of industrious Acadian French. These people have much simplicity in their manners, and strangers always meet with kindness and hospitality among them. They are principally engaged in the herring and cod fisheries; next to which they derive considerable assistance from the cultivation of the soil. They build boats and fishing vessels for themselves; and during the winter, some of the young men have, since 1817, spent part of their time in hewing timber in the woods; this, however, is an employment which they do not seem fond of. There is a Catholic church in this village; and on the beach, near the mouth of the harbour, there are salt stores, fish houses & &.

A more contented, honest and amiable population than the Acadians of Bonaventure, I have not met with.

Carlisle is the principal place in the district of Gaspé. It is laid out for a town; and its situation, during summer, is agreeable and beautiful. There is a substantial and handsome stone building here, in which the district court is held and in which there is also a jail *.

* Note - (I saw, in 1819, the judge of this court and his brother, who had been a captain in the army. They were certainly as perfect pictures of penury as could well be discovered in any country; and yet both were men of liberal education. They lived in a small house without

a servant; they cooked for themselves, and mended their own clothes, which were patched all over with various colours and seldom subjected to the influence of soap and water. The judge was formerly a lawyer at Quebec and said to be promoted to the Bench of the didtrict of Gaspe by the joint efforts of the Bar of which he was a member to get rid of so dirty and penurious a being. Hoarding money was the apparent object of their existence. The military man died since, I believe, of a fever ; the judge soon after committed suicide. He left a considerable fortune.)

The population is composed of people from different parts of America and Europe, and the character of the majority of them is considered not of the most honest description by the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements. Carlisle has no harbour, but vessels anchor with safety in the road during summer and autumn. Vast quantities of red herrings are cured in this place; and some of the lands are under tolerable cultivation.

PASPEBIAC

Two miles below Carlisle is the settlement of Paspébiac inhabited chiefly by Acadian French, who employ themselves principally in fishing. There are also several people from Jersey, attached to the highly respectable fishing establishment of Messrs Robin & Co. The harbour or lagoon of Paspébiac admits only very small schooners and boats; but ships and large schooners ride safely at anchor in the road. The fish stores, flakes & & are ranged along a very fine beach, where the people connected with the fisheries are incessantly employed during the summer and autumn; in winter they retire back near the woods.

Messrs. Robin's establishment was formed, I believe, nearly fifty years ago by the elder partner and parent of the firm; and its admirable plan of systematic management, the essential characteristics of which are ceaseless industry, frugality and prudent caution, and particularly in having no one engaged about

the business that is not usefully or productively employed, has long secured to it the most solid prosperity. During the summer their ships, ten, or often more, in number, are moored in the road, with their top-masts and yards lowered, and the whole, I believe, given in charge to one master and his crew; while the other masters, with their crews, are despatched in shallops to various parts of the bay, either to fish, or collect the cured fish from the fishermen who receive their supplies from Messrs Robin & Co. In autumn, the ships depart with full cargoes of the best fish for ports in Portugal, Spain, and within the Mediterranean. They also have a ship-building establishment, where they have built a ship annually; and I know one of these ships, the "DAY", now in good condition although built more than twenty-six years ago.

FROM PASPEBIAC TO PERCÉ

A few miles below Paspebiac is situated the small harbour and pretty settlement of Little Nouvelle; below which, as far along the coast as Cape Desespoir, the land and soil assume a rugged and rather barren appearance.

Port Daniel is the best harbour within the Bay de Chaleur, and the features of its scenery are dark, wild and prominent. There are but a few families in this place, and they appeared to me to be in great poverty. It is convenient for fishing; but the soil near the shore is rocky and barren.

Great and Little Pabos, and Grand River, are small harbours with intricate entrances, situated along the coast between Port Daniel and Cape Desespoir. The inhabitants, few in number, support themselves by the means of fishing and a little cultivation.

PERCÉ

Percé is the oldest fishing settlement in this district. It has a gaol, court-house and chapel. Immediately over it a mountain rises abruptly. This mountain I consider to be the first rise or commencement of the great

Alleghany chain....

Bonaventure Island lies about a mile east from Percé. Its south, east and north sides present inaccessible cliffs. On the west, opposite Percé, boats may always land, where there are two or three fishing plantations established by industrious adventurers from Jersey. This island and Percé are both important fishing ports and the inhabitants are all fishermen.

The channel between Percé and Bonaventure Island is deep, and without rocks or shoals, with the exception of Roc Percé, which stands at the northern entrance. This extraordinary and picturesque rock is nearly two hundred feet high, of a zig-zag narrow shape, and about three hundred feet long; it has two arches or openings through it, sufficiently large to allow boats carrying sail to pass under....

About two miles to the northward of this place, the inhabitants say that two English men-of-war were wrecked, which belonged to the squadron of Commodore Phipps that attempted to take Quebec in 1711, and that the sailors, after landing, perished from cold and want of food. This may be true, as few of Phipps's ships were ever heard of. The most superstitious stories of apparitions having often been seen, and of shouting and talking after the manner of sailors having been frequently heard, are related by the "habitans", who are of French descent. The wild, lofty and terrific character of the scenery, particularly in the fall and winter, when the winds blow furiously against the cliffs and round the mountains, with the impression that the crews of two ships perished there after landing, and that their bodies were never buried, are sufficient to work imaginations, naturally credulous, into the most unlimited belief in the marvellous.

GASPÉ BAY

Gaspé Harbour is one of the best in the world; it is situated immediately below the entrance of the River St. Lawrence. The inhabitants are thinly settled in three or four places, and are employed chiefly in the cod and herring fisheries. Little cultivation appears and there doesn't seem to be any great extent of good land about the harbour; farther up, in the valleys, excellent soil, covered with large trees, is met with. A few cargoes of timber have been shipped here for England; and some of the inhabitants pursue the whale-fishery, which has for some years been carried on at Gaspé.

The whales caught within the Gulf of St. Lawrence are those called "hump-backs", which yield, on an average, about three tons of oil; some have been taken seventy feet long, which produced eight tons. The mode of taking them is somewhat different from that followed by the Greenland whalers; and the Gaspé whalers first acquired an acquaintance with it from the people of Nantucket. An active man, accustomed to boats and schooners, may become fully acquainted with everything connected with this fishery in one season. The vessels best adapted for the purpose are schooners of from seventy to eighty tons burden, manned with a crew of eight men, including the master. Each schooner requires two boats, about twenty feet long, built narrow and sharp, and with "pink" sterns; and two hundred and twenty fathoms of line are necessary in each boat, with spare harpoons and lances. The men row towards the whale, and, when they are very near, use paddles, which make less noise than oars. Whales are sometimes taken fifteen minutes after they are struck with the harpoon. The Gaspé whalers never go out in quest of them until some of the small ones, which enter the bay about the beginning of June, appear; these swim too fast to be easily harpooned, are not, besides, worth the trouble. The large whales are taken off the entrance to Gaspé Bay, on each side of the Island of Anticosti, and up the River St. Lawrence as far as Bique.

The interior of the district of Gaspé is little known. The Indians and furriers have represented it to me as traversed by valleys, rivers and lakes. The want of roads will long prevent settlement. With the exception of a few miles occasionally along the Bay above Little Nouvelle, there are no roads except "bridle paths".

CAPE GASPE AND THE GULF COAST

Cape Gaspé is rather high and its rocky cliffs are perpendicular. Cape Rosier is low, but the land behind it rises into high round hills and the whole is covered with trees of various kinds, except for a few small spots near the Cape, cleared by some fishermen settled there... At Great Fox River there are also a few fishermen; and at Anse de L'Etang, twelve leagues above Cape Gaspé, there is a small harbour for shallops. It may be known by a remarkably high, wooded, conical hill on the east side, and by a beach with a few huts and stages on the west. Some of the "habitans" of the parish of St. Thomas, on the Riviere du Sud, thirty miles below Quebec, frequent this place during the cod-fishing season. The river issues from several lakes, one of which is only half a mile through the woods from the fish stages *

* Note- (I landed at this place, and travelled up to the lake. The river descends from it by three small but beautiful falls. The mountains, which are richly wooded, rise so high on each side and about the head of the lake, that although it is long it appeared little more than a large pond. The "habitans" had been rather successful in fishing, and they gave us some excellent small cod, and choice pieces of smoked halibut.)

Fishermen also frequent Grand Vallee des Monts, Magdalene, Mount Louis, St. Anne's and Cape Chat during summer; but I believe there are no permanent settlers (unless it be at St. Anne's) until we reach Matane.

IMPORTS- GASPE-1832

Vessels, 41; tons 6,670; men 379

RUM	gals	2,902	MUSCO. SUGAR	lbs	4,844
MOLASSES	"	3,111	TEA	"	644
GIN	"	49	RICE		5,057
COFFEE	lbs	333	TOBACCO		905
FLOUR	bbls	434	PORK	bbls	11
OATMEAL	"	1	BUTTER	kegs	2
OATS	bushl	33	TAR	bbls	6
POTATOES	"	2400	SALT	tons	53
APPLES	bbls	10	SALT	minots	6,920

EXPORTS - GASPE - 1832

Vessels 21; tons 1848; men 159

PINE TIMBER	pieces	643	SALMON	bbls	51
DEALS	"	38,136	SALMON	½ "	1
DEAL ENDS	"	3,897	FISH OIL	gals	10,101
STAVES	"	19,928	IRON	tons	26
LATHWOOD	ords	25	IRON	pigs	31
COD FISH	cwt	14,296			