

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

GASPESIA'S FIRST SCHOOL INSPECTOR

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For those Gaspesians who may wonder if the problems and controversies of education will never cease in our time, there is scant comfort in the historical reflection that educational controversy has been endemic to Québec for the past 200 years. For, while consideration of how best to educate youth is as old as Plato's "REPUBLIC", education in Québec has, for two centuries, been troubled by particular and diverse opinions on the role of the parent, Church, State and ethnic tradition. What is relatively new in recent years is the massive intervention of the State with concurrent politicization of education.

This article will attempt to take the reader back to an earlier age in Gaspesia - to the mid-19th century - at a time when Dr. Meilleur had accepted the post of Superintendent of Education with the firm assurance that the administration of Québec education would be above and beyond political influence and pressure.. By virtue of the Act 14/15 Victoria, the first school inspectors had been named and assigned to the various regions of Québec. Me. Peter Winter was to be Gaspesia's first school inspector - his official reports on the conditions of education on the Coast are a precious part of the Gaspesian heritage

Ken Annett

## GASPESIA'S FIRST SCHOOL INSPECTOR

It should be recalled, to put this account in perspective, that when Peter Winter was appointed as the first inspector of schools for the District of Gaspé in 1851 there had been schools in operation in various Gaspesian settlements for more than a half century. "GASPE OF YESTERDAY" has previously referred to such schools in both Loyalist and Acadian communities. However, little assessment or official record of the schooling situation had been made until the time of Winter's first report, presented to the Québec Legislature by the Superintendent of Education, Dr. Meilleur and published in the Legislative Journal of 1852-53.

### PETER WINTER - SOME BACKGROUND

The family name of WINTER was a familiar one to Gaspesians. James Ferguson Winter was prominent on the Coast as Sheriff of the District of Gaspé and has been mentioned in "GASPE OF YESTERDAY" articles in connection with the tempestuous political and social controversies in the time of Robert Christie. He was a resident of Paspébiac from May, 1815 until at least 1832. Born in 1761 he died at the age of 75 years, an inmate of the Finlay Asylum in Québec City and was buried from the Anglican Cathedral on January 29, 1836.

The grandparents of Peter Winter, Joseph and Anne Egar Winter, a Roman Catholic couple from Durham, England, had come to live in Québec city circa 1775. Their son, Robert, grew up to marry Marie-Julie Letourneau, the daughter of Michael and Catherine Routhier Letourneau at the Eglise Notre Dame, Québec, in 1798, and it was in that church that their son, Peter Winter, born February 25, 1808, was baptized.

It was in the city of Québec that Peter Winter grew up and received his early education. He was accepted by one of the leading Law firms of the Old Capital to read for the Law and was admitted to the Québec Bar in 1833. In the same year he married, at the Eglise Notre Dame, Lucy Catherine Pitt, the daughter of Thomas and Josephite Houssman Pitt of Québec.

Peter Winter began the practice of Law in Québec City before moving to Percé, in the District of Gaspé, where he soon built up an excellent clientele. In 1847 he was appointed as the Clerk (Greffier) of the Superior Court of Percé.

While the record does not reveal the kind of persuasion used by the Superintendent of Education, Dr. Meilleur, to induce Peter Winter to set aside, temporarily, his legal career to serve as Gaspesia's first inspector of schools, it may well have been the gravity of the situation for education in the District of Gaspé. The situation had legal overtones in that the School Law was not being observed, School Commissioners and Secretary-Treasurers were abdicating their responsibilities and resigning, at will, while registers, account books and reports were not kept or simply disappeared. The role of the first school inspector would be an extraordinary one - a task in which he could expect to face indifference and even open hostility.

#### INTRODUCTION TO WINTER'S FIRST OFFICIAL REPORT.

Though Peter Winter had received instructions, both verbal and written, as to his school inspection duties, from the Superintendent of Education in Québec at the end of May, 1851, he was delayed in his return to the District of Gaspé until the end of June. Firstly, he had to wait for a vessel bound for Gaspesia and, secondly, having secured a passage, experienced an unusually slow trip down the river and gulf of St. Lawrence. He began his tour of inspection on July 1st.

In the belief that population statistics of the District, according to the latest census, should be a priority item of his report, Winter prepared and annotated tables of the population of the various school municipalities, commenting particularly on:

- . The extent of his jurisdiction on the St. Lawrence shore.
- . On the distinction to be made between the census districts of the County of Gaspé and their division into school municipalities.
- . On the reception that he received in the various communities.

At the time of this first school inspection the existing school municipalities were as follows:

BONAVENTURE COUNTY

Matapedia and Restigouche  
Mann  
Nouvelle and Shoolbred  
Carleton  
Maria  
New Richmond  
Hamilton  
Cox  
Hope  
Port Daniel

GASPE COUNTY

Fox and Griffon Cove  
Cap des Rosiers  
Gaspé Bay, North and Sydenham  
Gaspé Bay South  
York and Haldimand  
Douglas  
Mal Bay  
Percé  
Grand River  
Newport and Pabos

In Bonaventure County the 10 school municipalities were sub-divided into 44 wards. There were 21 school buildings with 19 schools actually in operation. Some schools were held in private homes that were borrowed or rented for the purpose. In general, education of youth was greatly hampered by a shortage of competent teachers, the lack of means of the inhabitants and the all too common reluctance of school commissioners to assume their responsibilities. Few knew the School Law - much was left in the hands of the Sec.-Treas.

In Gaspé County the educational situation was worse than in neighbouring Bonaventure County. There, the ten school municipalities were divided into 26 wards with seventeen schools in operation. There were four independent schools. Winter was to find the situation regarding school commissioners quite deplorable and reported that maladministration and misapplication of such grants as Government provided, widespread. In both Counties he was told, more than once:

"I got along fine without schooling, my kids can do the same"

While teacher's salaries were shown, for report purposes, as varying from £ 30 to £ 50 per annum, in reality the teachers were fortunate if they received £ 5 to £ 10 in currency. They were obliged to take most of their remuneration in produce - food, wood, etc., - calculated at the high rates for such produce obtaining in

COMMENT ON BONAVENTURE COUNTY SCHOOLS1. MATAPEDIA AND RESTIGOUCHE

These two townships were united for municipal and school purposes. There were 5 wards: 2 in Matapedia and 3 in Restigouche. There was only 1 school house - five miles above the Matapedia River. There had been two or three schools in operation. No registers, records or account books had been kept. The teacher had to take up a collection as means of remuneration.

2. MANN

No school house and no school in operation. Rev. Olscamp, missionary to the Micmac Indians proposed to request a special grant from the Québec Legislature for Indian education. Winter agreed to seek support of the Supt. of Education for such a petition. There was urgent and great need for Indian education.

3. NOUVELLE AND SHOOLBRED

An extensive territory with an extent of some 21 miles. There were 8 wards. Three school buildings but only one school, and that that mediocre, in operation. The school building at Escouminac (sic) had burnt a year and a half ago.

4. CARLETON

There were 3 wards. One very good school in operation - it might be classified as a model school. Two other school buildings were under construction.

5. NEW RICHMOND

Had 6 wards. There were 4 school buildings with 4 common schools in operation. Winter noted that there was also a New Richmond dissentient school in operation.

6. MARIA

Divided into 6 wards. Had four school buildings with four schools in operation

7. HAMILTON

There were 5 wards. Two school in operation in private homes that had been borrowed or rented. Noted that two school buildings were under construction.

8. COX

Had 4 wards. Three school buildings with three schools in operation. Had an excellent, independent school for girls. Commissioners requested increased government grants as the school population had grown. Winter recommended that the Paspébiac school house be moved nearer the center of that community - near the Roman Catholic church.

9. HOPE

There were 2 wards. Had 2 school buildings with 2 schools in operation. [Reference: GASPE OF YESTERDAY - EARLY SCHOOLS IN GASPE] ]

10. PORT DANIEL

Divided into 3 wards. Had a school house in each ward but only 1 school actually in operation. Winter shocked by the action of the commissioners in allowing 2 of the school houses to be used as private dwellings.

COMMENT ON SCHOOLS OF GASPE COUNTY1. NEWPORT AND PABOS

Nothing had been done in this school municipality for past four years. The commissioners had dispersed - R.W.Kelly, Charles McGinnis and the Sec.Treas., no longer residents. One school building had burnt and another was occupied by one, Ringuet. A third had been commenced but remained unfinished.

Mr. Kelly was living at New Carlisle and had promised a statement of the finances of the Board.

Commissioners must be appointed. Several persons had been recommended to Winter - Messrs Nazire Dupuis; Philip Hamon; Patrick McKenny; George Sutton, Jr.; Lawrence Keehan and James McNeil.

2. GRAND RIVER

Two school buildings but only 1 school, miserably kept, was in operation.

3. PERCE

One school was operating at Percé and another at Cape Cove. This municipality used to have 7 schools but most had ceased operation because of the lack of energy and responsibility of the commissioners. The commissioners gave as their excuse that they didn't want continual war with their neighbours - consequently they had done little.

4. MAL BAY

Reported a glaring lack of local support for schools. No taxes or voluntary contributions had been collected to supplement the government grant. The school building in need of repair. The Sec.Treas. hostile to Winter - refused to produce registers, account books, etc. The Anglican Minister, Rev. Smith absolved of complicity in actions of commissioners because of his youth and inexperience in public affairs. Winter of the opinion that grounds existed for Criminal Action against this school board.

5. DOUGLAS

Again, little local support for the 1 school in operation. The teacher was supposed to depend for salary on fees paid by parents of pupils. The School Law was not observed. Many children were being deprived of an education.

6. YORK AND HALDIMAND

This township had lately been separated from that of Gaspé South. No commissioners had been appointed, as yet. Winter would submit names to Superintendent of Education following local consultation.

7. GASPE SOUTH

It was here that Winter encountered the most open hostility in Gaspesia. The commissioners had resigned and the Sec.Treas., Joseph Eden, refused to produce any of the Board's registers, account books or other papers.

Winter was told bluntly that his appointment as School Inspector was regarded in Gaspé South as an injustice and insult to the Protestant population. A circular to that effect had been drawn up and sent to the neighbouring school boards of Fox. Cap des Rosiers, Gaspé North and Sydenham, Douglas and Mal Bay. Its purpose was to seek a general boycott of Winter as Inspector.

7.

Winter reported that he was appalled by such a reception - using such terms to describe it as: "ridiculous" - "extreme effrontery" - "extreme fanaticism".

He reported that the Anglican Minister of Gaspé Basin, Rev. De las Mare had disclaimed such sentiments.

There had been no election of school commissioners last year. One of the former commissioners, Thomas Suddard, was resident in York, now separated from Gaspé South. The Board must be reconstituted.

8. GASPE NORTH AND SYDENHAM

The commissioners, influenced by the circular of Joseph Eden as Sec. Treas. of Gaspé South, had resigned. As to school buildings, Winter noted that they had been built with material supplied by the inhabitants. There was no general levy for education and the teachers of the 2 schools had to collect what they could from the parents of pupils. Teachers had to find board and lodging, in turn, with various parents.

9. CAP DES ROSIERS

Agitation, stemming from the circular distributed by Gaspé South, had so frightened one of the teachers that he had left the community. One good school remained in operation. It was expected that a second school would open soon.

10. FOX AND GRIFFON COVE

One school had been open the previous year but it had been discontinued because of failure to pay the teacher.

The commissioners were little inclined to raise the money needed to operate a school.

[ While communities on the St. Lawrence shore to the West of Fox were not within the jurisdiction of Peter Winter, he noted the following pupil populations:

Anse à Pâlo (sic).....10	Pointe Séche.....6
Grand Etang..... 2	Cloridon (sic)....18 ]

SOME GENERAL REMARKS OF WINTER'S REPORT

. There was not a single, model school in the whole of the District of Gaspé. He was, however, much impressed by the excellence of the Independent School for Girls, New Carlisle, taught by Mrs. Ste-Croix.



- . While a few school houses were well kept, most of them were unfinished, neglected and uncomfortable. Few had chimneys with consequent high risk of fire. The use of paint, or even of whitewash, was the exception. While a few schools had adequate equipment many lacked tables, benches and even blackboards
- . Complaints were general and justified about the lack of books. Those that were in use were often of questionable quality and worth.
- . A strong recommendation was made that teachers be required to pass an examination, "not only on their literary qualifications, but regarding their character, sobriety, etc." To that end an Examiner's Board should be established in and for the District of Gaspé as its teachers could not afford to travel to Québec to appear before the Board there. A District of Gaspé's Examiner's Board could include: Judges, Priests, Clergymen and the Inspector of Schools. Its sessions should be held at Percé and New Carlisle.
- . The existing system of governments was quite inadequate for the school population of some 5000 children spread over the territory from Matapedia to Fox, and should be revised and increased.

#### POSTSCRIPT

The 1851 report of Peter Winter, as Gaspesia's first inspector of Schools provides a fascinating glimpse into the state and needs of public education in our District those 130 years ago. Its text is revealing of the logical thought processes and the analytical skill of one trained for and experienced with the Law. In a unique way this report reflects the Gaspesian attitudes and prejudices that lingered from the tempest of political and social controversy that had rocked Gaspesia some years earlier in the time of Robert Christie and John Ferguson Winter. It would mark a start towards much needed change and reform for Gaspesian schooling and could only benefit those most directly concerned - the Youth of Gaspesia.

In 1858, Peter Winter was appointed as Judge of the Superior Court of the County of Bonaventure. Ten years later he transferred to the County of Gaspé where he served as Judge until his retirement from the Bench in 1874. From then, until his death in 1891, at the age of 83, he lived in retirement at New Carlisle among his Law books and friends.