

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

FISHERY REPORT BY MOSES PERLEY-1849  
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FASCINATING GLIMPSES INTO YESTERDAY IN GASPEZIA ARE PROVIDED BY ACCOUNTS OF THE FISHERIES THAT EXTEND BACK IN TIME TO THE 16th CENTURY. THE WRITINGS OF JACQUES CARTIER, SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, NICOLAS DENYS AND MANY OTHERS REFLECT THE GASPE SCENE OF THE FRENCH REGIME. THE WORKS OF THE LATE DR. JOHN CLARKE AND OF THE LATE ARTHUR LE GROS CHRONICLED THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE JERSEY AND GUERNSEY FIRMS.

THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT FROM A REPORT MADE IN 1849 TO THE NEW BRUNSWICK HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, PROVIDES AN INTERESTING GLIMPSE OF THE GASPESIAN FISHERY AT THAT TIME.

KEN ANNETT

EXTRACTS FROM

A REPORT ON THE FISHERIES IN THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE

TO

THE NEW BRUNSWICK HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

1849

"...The Baie des Chaleurs cod are more prized in the markets of the Mediterranean, and will, at all times, sell there more readily, and at higher prices, than any other. They are beautifully white; and being very dry, can better withstand the effects of a hot climate and long voyage, than a more moist fish. The peculiarity of their being smaller than the cod caught elsewhere is also of great importance as regards the South American market, for which they are packed in "drums" or tubs of a peculiar shape..

The Jersey merchants prosecute these fisheries with great zeal and assiduity, and it is believed, with much profit. They have permanent establishments in Gaspe, Labrador and Newfoundland and three or more establishments in New Brunswick; but they by no means confine themselves to any particular locality. They employ upwards of one hundred vessels almost exclusively in carrying the rich products of the deep to various markets, besides the smaller craft required upon the coast. Two of the leading Jersey firms, Messrs. Robin & Co. and Nicolle Brothers, are supposed respectively to afford employment, directly or indirectly, to nearly one thousand persons.

Paspebiac, sixty miles from Dalhousie, derives its name from an Indian word signifying "The Great Landing". This landing is a long, curved, gravel spit, which stretches out into the Baie des Chaleurs, forming one side a tolerable harbour, and nearly enclosing between it and the main land, a barachois or lagoon, very convenient as a shelter for fishing boats and shallops.

On the beach at Paspebiac is situate the depot of the

wealthy and well known firm of Charles Robin and Co., of Jersey, which was first established here in 1768 by the late Charles Robin, the founder of the firm, and has since gradually increased to its present extent. This excellent establishment comprises a great number of well finished buildings, stores, warehouses, forges, sail lofts, and workshops for every variety of purpose connected with the business, all kept in the neatest possible order. Each building of the establishment is numbered or lettered, and appropriated to a specific purpose; on no account is it permitted to be used for any other. An extensive stock of valuable goods is kept here; and a neat battery of six-pounders is always in good order, and ready for instant use, to protect the establishment. There is a ship-yard here, at which the firm have always built one vessel annually, for more than half a century, and from the care taken in selecting the timber, and in building, these vessels have become noted for their extraordinary durability.

Every spring a whole fleet of ships and brigantines belonging to the firm arrive at Paspebiac from Jersey with double crews, and all the necessary stores for the season. These vessels are moored in front of the beach, their sails are unbent and stored, their topmasts and yards are struck and housed. The whole of the vessels are placed in charge of one master and crew, who take care of them during the summer, and issue the salt, with which they are ballasted, as it is required. The rest of the masters and crews are dispatched in boats and shallops to various parts of the Bay to fish, and collect fish from those who deal with the firm. When the fishing season is over these vessels depart with cargoes for the West Indies and Brazil, but more frequently to the Mediterranean - to the ports of Messina and Naples. After disposing of their cargoes, they thence take fruit or other freight to England; and fitting out again at St. Heliers, in Jersey, where the heads of the firm reside, they return to Paspebiac in the spring, to resume the business of the season.

The admirable plan of systematic arrangement at this establishment, the great characteristics of which are ceaseless industry, frugality, and caution - and especially the strict enforcement of the rule that no person shall be retained about the business who cannot be profitably employed - have long secured it the most solid prosperity, and enabled the intelligent and enterprising founder of the firm to bequeath to his family a great amount of wealth.

On the same beach, adjoining the establishment of Robin & Co., is that of LeBoutillier Brothers, of Jersey, which, though not so extensive as the other, is well and neatly arranged, and kept in excellent order. The three brothers Le Boutillier were trained by the house of Robin & Co., and conduct the fishing business in the same systematic manner as that house, trading to the same ports, and with equal success and profit, but on a less extensive scale. Their whole export of dried fish for the year 1849 was expected to fall little short of 20,000 quintals.

Mr. LaPerelle, the chief agent of the establishment of Robin & Co., stated that their House would export from 40,000 to 45,000 quintals of dried cod in the season of 1849 to the Brazils and Mediterranean ports. The fish for the Brazils are packed as already mentioned, in "drums" into which they are pressed by a powerful screw. Each drum contains exactly 128 lbs. of dry fish, that being the Portuguese quintal; and the drums are shaped to suit the convenience of the Brazilians, who transport them into the interior of South America, slung in pairs upon mules. For the Mediterranean markets, the fish are stowed in the holds of the vessels in bulk, and seldom receive damage, such is the excellent manner in which they are cured and stowed. The best and whitest of the cod are required for the Neapolitan market, for even the lazzaroni of Naples are very particular as to the quality of their fish.

Mr LaPerelle said that the capelin struck in abundantly at Paspebiac the past season, and were used largely as manure. Herring do

one time during the past summer there were five American schooners at anchor, about a mile from Messrs. Robin's establishment. They fished at the distance of three miles from the point of the beach for mackerel, and obtained full fares; some of the vessels had nine hundred barrels; while they were fishing they destroyed the shore fishery for cod, as the fishers could not catch a sufficiency of mackerel for bait.

Among the standing orders of the house of Robin & Co. for the regulation of their fishermen, is one that they shall not split or clean their fish on the fishing grounds, but always bring them to the shore before performing these operations. These people in their own employ are obliged to comply with this order strictly, and they endeavour to induce all others to be guided by it. They conceive it very injurious to the fisheries to throw bones and offal among the fish, and the opinion of the firm on this point, from their long experience and knowledge of the subject, must be deemed quite conclusive.

....Between Maguacha Point, at the entrance of the Ristigouche, on its northern side, and Tracadegash, on the Gaspe shore, a distance of about fifteen miles, is Carleton Bay. ...Mr. Joseph Marr, the Postmaster at Tracadegash, stated that the cod fishery was formerly prosecuted extensively in Carleton Bay, from the beach, but it has fallen off very greatly. The buildings formerly occupied as "fishing rooms" yet standing are now deserted, while of others the foundations only are seen. There are not so many cod now in the upper part of the Baie des Chaleurs (above Bonaventure) as formerly, but more haddock. Mackerel of the finest quality were taken off Tracadegash Point during the past season, but only in small quantities from want of the required skill and outfit. Mr. Marr was of the opinion that 20,000 barrels of mackerel might have been taken during the season in Carleton Bay by those who understood the fishery...

Mr. Edward Mann, who resides at Tracadegash, was prosecuting the herring fishing while the writer was there, in September. Mr. Mann is

a person of much intelligence and information, and he cured his herrings in a proper manner. Immediately on being caught the head of each fish was cut off, which allowed all the blood to escape; they were then gutted, cleaned and salted at once. These fish were very firm, admirably white and delicate, and possessed a fine flavour. All the fish which Mr. Mann would thus put up during the season, were engaged at one pound, seven shillings and sixpence per barrel, thus affording the most convincing proof that attention to curing alone was quite sufficient to ensure a market and a high price for these herrings. They were, when caught, precisely the same as the Caraqueet herrings, which, from carelessness and mismanagement, are without value.

....On the beach at Bonaventure Harbour, Messieurs George and Ferdinand Boissonault, natives of Canada, have a neat store and fishing establishment; and the Jersey houses have buildings for receiving and storing dry fish. The Messieurs Boissonault stated that there were about one hundred and twenty boats, with two men each, engaged in the cod fishery on the coast between Tracadegash and Bonaventure; and that the catch of these boats would average one hundred quintals of dry and pickled fish each during the season. Not many capelin are now seen at this place owing to their having been formerly used largely as manure. Several thousand barrels of herrings are yet used annually at this settlement for the like purpose, and in consequence the cod fishing has greatly fallen off at this place; fishermen who formerly caught three hundred quintals of fish during the season now only get one hundred quintals.

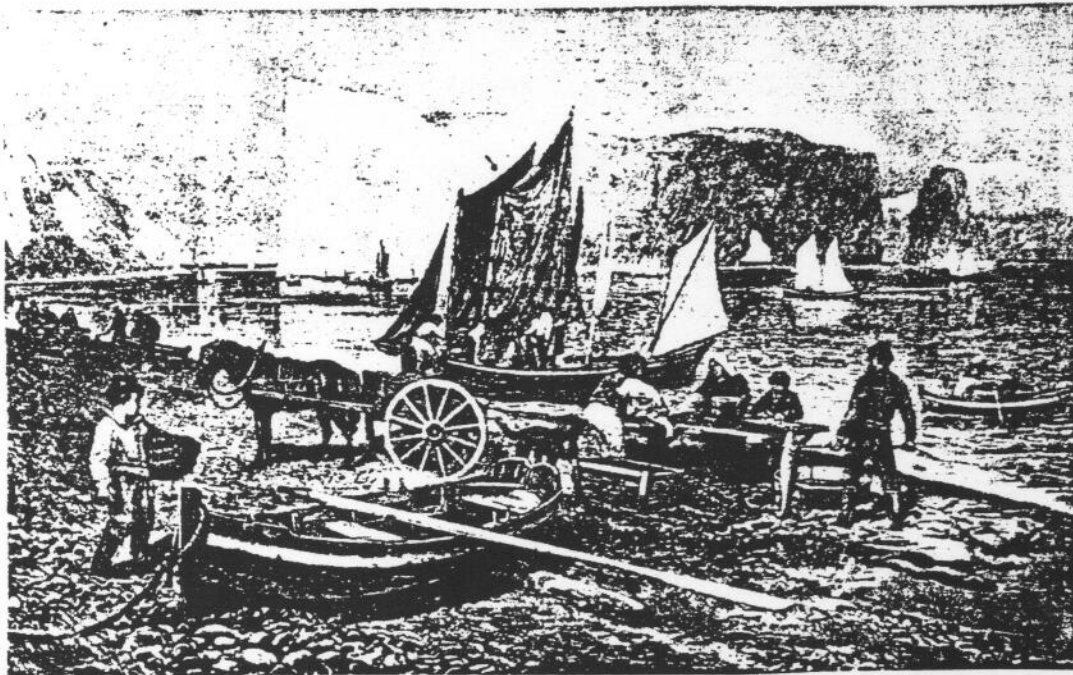
Several American vessels were off this place during the season, and obtained full fares of mackerel; they injured the cod fishing materially by depriving the fisheries of their bait.

Messrs. Boissonault strongly advocate the appointment of a Government Inspector, to inspect and brand all fish; as well to give character to the article as to prevent the gross frauds sometimes practised. They mentioned the fact of barrels of fish being sold as containing mackerel, the ends of which only contained that fish, the centre part of each barrel

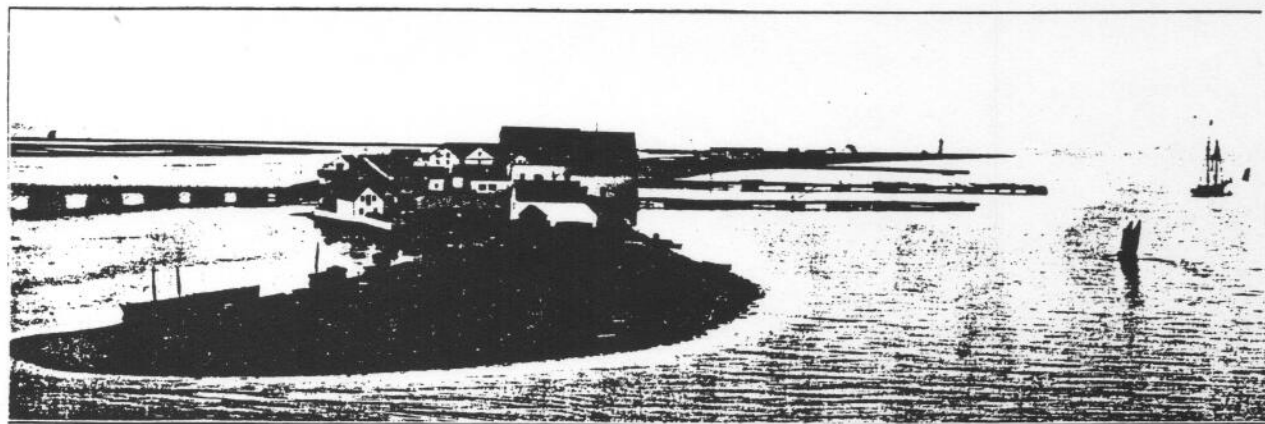
The entrance to Bonaventure Harbour is between two long narrow bars of gravel, one extending from a high bank on the south side, and the other from the flat on the north, upon which stands the village of Bonaventure. There is sufficient depth of water in the gully to admit vessels of two hundred tons at high water. Inside the gully there is an extensive basin, and vessels lie directly against the gravel bank, with three fathoms at low water. The Bonaventure River is about sixty miles in length; it is called by the Indians the "Wagamet" or "Clear Water", from the exceeding purity and brilliancy of its waters. There are but few salmon in this river, or fish of any description, which is supposed to arise from the very extraordinary clearness of its waters; (Footnote - However correct this statement may have been in Perley's time, the conditions are now (1912) entirely different from those described by him. The Bonaventure is one of the finest salmon rivers of the continent. Moreover, clear water is favourable to salmon, and in the Grand River of Gaspe, one of the best on the coast, almost every salmon in the pools may often be seen and counted) and this absence of fish in the Bonaventure distinguishes it from every other river in the Baie des Chaleurs. It may be said to be "the exception that proves the rule".

Large quantities of sea trout enter the basin of Bonaventure from the Baie des Chaleurs with every flood tide, and go out again with the ebb; these fish have been designated "tide trout". They are of large size, and are readily taken by fly fishers from the sides of the gully, just as the flood begins to make. The sportsman, standing on the bar amid kelp and sea weed, may here have excellent sport for about an hour each tide, until driven off by the advancing waves. He may then follow the fish up to the basin, taking them at every cast, and perhaps conclude the fishing for that tide under the stern or alongside some large vessel loading in the basin. Again, on the ebb tide there is good fishing for a short time, but it is more difficult then to hit off the fish, as they all appear to move out to sea in a body. The fish were brilliantly white, and in fine condition, very firm

lives at Bonaventure Beach, that in the early part of the season he took many of these fine fish of the weight of three pounds and upwards. It is said that salmon had been occasionally taken at this place with rod and line, while fishing for tide trout.



PERCÉ



HARBOR OF PASPEBIAC.