



COMMANDER WILLIAM WAKEHAM, M.D., C.M.

PART I OF A RECALL OF THE LIFE AND
CAREER OF WILLIAM WAKEHAM OF "ONE
ASH", GASPE, MEDICAL DOCTOR AND
OVERSEER OF THE FISHERIES IN THE
LOWER RIVER AND GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE.
IN HIS TIME AND THROUGHOUT HIS LONG
AND DISTINGUISHED CAREER, WILLIAM
WAKEHAM WAS ONE OF GASPE'S MOST
WIDELY KNOWN AND RESPECTED CITIZENS.



KEN ANNETT



OTTAWA, CAN.



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PART I

No better introduction to the story of Commander William Takeham could be found than that provided by Dr. John M. Clarke in his interesting book on Gaspesia, L'ILE PERCEE, when he wrote:

" On my first visit to the Gaspé country (and that was many years ago) my companion of Yale, Charles Schuchest, and I carried a letter of introduction to Dr. William Takeham, long the federal inspector of marine fisheries on the whole gulf coast and for still longer a medical practitioner in Gaspe. He was Commander Takeham, skipper of the official cruiser, first the CANADIENNE and afterwards the PRINCESS, the best known personage in all Gaspé and all its surrounding coasts, of the Quebec Labrador, Prince Edward Island and the islands of the Gulf. To his admirable training in human anatomy, physiology and pathology was added an extraordinary and probably unique acquaintance with every phase of the fisheries, not only its proper business but the science of it, the biology and economy of the fishes. He was a man of science of high merit. Bluff, handsome, weatherbeaten by a thousand gales, a cordial and gracious host, an autocratic executive and magistrate, he knew the coast, its natural and its human history, as no one else could, but his modesty and reserve, his disposition to see little in his work but the execution of commonplace duty, kept his hand from a not too willing pen and deprived his country of what should have been the record of a meritorious, scientific and not unromantic service. A few summers ago the PRINCESS dropped anchor in the south bay at Percé, and he came ashore in his rig, and while his sailors were in the village for supplies, we sat on the bottom of an upturned whale boat while I

inveigled him into some of his reminiscences, and begged him once more to "write his book"; for the book that was in him could not be written by another. "I should not know where to begin or end", he replied. He found the end indeed before the beginning, for only a few months passed and his unwritten story was closed"

Gaspésians of today are reminded of the life and influence of this remarkable man in a number of ways. The community of Wakeham on the beautiful South-West Arm of Gaspé Bay bears his name as does Wakeham Bay on distant Labrador. The solid stone house, "ONE ASH", that he had built as his Gaspé home still stands, overlooking the Basin of Gaspé at the corner of Wakeham and Queen streets. What a story would be told of the past century in Gaspé if only the stones of its walls could talk ! And in a tree-shaded plot of Gaspé's St. Paul Anglican Cemetery a modest tomb-stone marks his final resting place. The site overlooks the haven from which he often sailed for the distant and often dangerous waters of the Gulf, North Shore and the Arctic.

It is with reserve that I venture to write of Commander Wakeham, who was of the generation of my grandfather, as there are, no doubt, memories of him persisting among Gaspésians. As, for instance, the recollections of Mrs. Henry Miller Clark who has written:

"I have a childish memory of Commander Wakeham and "ONE ASH" which I have cherished. I went to "ONE ASH" with my Aunt Alma Palmer who used to work there before her marriage. It was a cold day and Mrs. Dumeresq mixed Aunt Alma a sweet ginger drink. When I refused one the Commander jokingly asked me if I would like some "gin" without the "ger"; then gave me a bag of after-dinner mints and took me into his conservatory to see his plants and flowers. I distinctly remember an orange or lemon tree with

two fruit growing on it. I was also astonished to see water drawn from a tap instead of being pumped..."

The late Charles Davis of Gaspé shared with me his many recollections of Commander Wakeham. He recalled that the great stone house had been constructed over a period of years by skilled Gaspé craftsmen such as the late Luther Coffin. In particular he remembered the addition of the Music Room and the glass-roofed Conservatory. As a visitor to "ONE ASH" with his father, John F. Davis, he had been fascinated by the display of animal trophies and Commander Wakeham's collection of fine, English-made guns that were kept in the Sporting Room. Following the death of Commander Wakeham, Charles Davis, also an ardent sports fisherman and hunter, acquired some of these prized guns from the Wakeham estate. Among the friends of Commander Wakeham who were his guests in Gaspé the names of Messrs. Bland, Garland and Stimpson were recalled. They had private yachts that would be moored in the Basin. It was Charles Davis' recollection that among the men of Gaspé who were engaged in season by Commander Wakeham and his guests were Amasa and John Ascah and Wilton Guignon - it is probably that their descendants have memorabilia of that period. A copy of the Last Will and Testament of Commander Wakeham was preserved among the Davis Papers and is before me as I write.

From the home of Lawrence Annett of York I have, by courtesy of Stephen Coull, pictures of the S.S. DIANA, the ship in which Commander Wakeham and his crew, including men of Gaspé, sailed on an historic expedition to Hudson Bay, Cumberland Strait and the Arctic Islands in 1897. The significance of that voyage has been stressed by the article of Daniel Francis in the Canadian Geographical Journal of 1977 entitled: STAKING CANADA'S CLAIM TO THE ARCTIC ISLANDS.

The portrait of Commander Wakeham by Topley of Ottawa, submitted

with this article, is a copy of the one given by him to his Gaspé friend, my grandfather, Felix J. Annett.

While records of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, the Public Archives of Canada and of Quebec, the McGill University Archives and the Canadian Government Reports have yielded information on Commander Wakeham's life and career, one can only regret, as did Dr. John Clarke, that he did not record, himself, the remarkable story of his experiences and accomplishments.

From church records of the city of Quebec for the year 1845 we learn that:

"William, son of George Wakeham of Quebec, Keeper of the House of Correction and of Mary, his wife, by her maiden name, Davidson, was born November 30th and baptized December 25th., 1845

by me,

E.W.Mills (Incumbent)

Chapel of the Holy Trinity

The marriage of William's parents, George Wakeham, Storekeeper, of Quebec and Mary, daughter of William Davidson, Farmer, of Ste. Roy had been solemnized on Christmas Eve, 1840, in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity, Quebec by the Rev. E.W.Mills. Of their children, a daughter, Eliza, born in 1843, died in infancy. William was born in 1845 and was followed by a daughter, Elizabeth in 1848 and a son, George, in 1848. The next son, Thomas, born in 1850 died in infancy. In the decade 1850 - 1860 two sons, James and George and two daughters, Mary and Annie were born to complete the Wakeham family.

In 1845 George Wakeham was appointed as the Superintendent of the newly founded Beauport Lunatic Asylum. For some years previously there had been public agitation in Quebec and district for the provision of

an institution for the care of the mentally deranged. Representations had been made to the Government, particularly by the hospital authorities who bore an ever increasing and intolerable burden in attempting to care for both the physically and mentally ill. The challenge was met by three prominent Quebec doctors, Douglas, Morrin and Fremont, who founded the Beauport Lunatic Asylum on the fine country estate of Judge de Bonne in Beauport. From this original foundation has grown the great institution known today as the Robert Giffard Medical Centre, one of Canada's largest centers for the treatment and care of the mentally ill.

During the first two decades of the Beauport Asylum's existence, its first Superintendent, George Wakeham, established a solid reputation as a concerned and competent administrator.

Young William Wakeham grew up in the stimulating environment of 19th Century Quebec with its busy shipbuilding yards, vast timber coves, international maritime traffic and busy commerce of the St. Lawrence waterway and hinterland. After completing his secondary school studies at Quebec High School, William enrolled at Victoria College, Cobourg. He also studied at the Royal School of Military Instruction at Quebec, graduating with distinction in 1865. Having decided to train as a doctor he then entered the School of Medicine of McGill University whence he graduated M.D., C.M.

Though I have been unable to document the reasons that led Dr. William Wakeham to establish his medical practice in Gaspé, I suspect that the influence of Dr. Pierre Fortin may have been a factor. A fellow McGill graduate in medicine, and pioneer Overseer of the Fisheries in the Lower River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, Dr. Fortin knew Gaspé well and may have spoken to young Dr. Wakeham of the need and opportunities for medical practice in Gaspé.

Meanwhile, in Quebec, William's father, George Wakeham, had seen the need for the establishment of another institution than that of the Beauport Lunatic Asylum to care for mental illness generally and those brought on more specifically by inebriety. To that end he purchased, in 1864, from the Fabrique Notre Dame of Quebec, the property of BELMONT - a gracious mansion set in twenty-six arpents of grounds - and there set up the institution known as the BELMONT RETREAT. The BELMONT estate was of such historic significance that a brief account of it may be of interest.

During the French Regime the estate of BELMONT, comprising some four hundred and fifty acres of land to the West of Quebec along the Ste. Foy Road, was owned by the Jesuits. The noted Intendant, Jean Talon, later acquired the estate. Following the British Conquest BELMONT became the property of the first Governor, General James Murray. In 1775, during the American invasion of Quebec, General Richard Montgomery occupied the BELMONT manor. But in the memory of Quebecers BELMONT must always remain more particularly connected with the Caldwell family - three generations of whom occupied its spacious halls - Colonel Henry Caldwell who was prominent in the defence of Quebec during the American invasion, his son, John, and his grandson, Sir Henry Caldwell. It was this historic property that George Wakeham acquired and converted into the BELMONT RETREAT where:

"wealthy patients are treated with that delicate care which they could not expect in a crowded asylum."

To serve the growing clientele of his father's BELMONT RETREAT, Dr. William Wakeham took leave of his Gaspé practice in 1876 to become head of the medical staff in the treatment of cases of inveterate alcoholism and insanity. The Canadian Medical Review for 1878-1879 referred to the work of the BELMONT RETREAT and to the life-long interest in and study of Dipsomania of its medical director, Dr. William Wakeham. This important

aspect of his career was evidently not known to such authors as Morgan who noted in his CANADIAN MEN AND WOMEN OF THE TIME that Dr. Wakeham had successfully practiced his profession at Gaspé Basin up to his appointment to command the Fisheries Protection Service in the Lower River and Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1879.

In turning to recall of the new career on which Dr. William Wakeham embarked in 1879 some striking and intriguing parallels are evident in the life of the pioneer Overseer of the Fisheries, Dr. Pierre Fortin and that of Dr. Wakeham, who would maintain and extend the work of his predecessor in that post. Both men, graduates of McGill in medicine, had practiced their profession in situations of particular stress - Dr. Fortin during the cholera epidemic and Dr. Wakeham among the mentally ill at the BELMONT RETREAT - before turning to a new career in the Fisheries Service. Neither man married. Both had early military experience - Dr. Fortin during the Montreal Riots and Dr. Wakeham at the Royal School of Military Instruction - in the course of which each had displayed outstanding qualities of initiative and leadership. The two men were not mere acquaintances but were good friends for Dr. Fortin often travelled with Commander Wakeham on his Fisheries Protection Patrol vessel. It would appear that each man had made the decision to leave medical practice out of a conviction that they could serve their country and fellow men more effectively and widely in the Fisheries Service. And in that service each man often had the occasion to use his medical knowledge and skill in visiting the many isolated communities of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

When Commander Wakeham assumed his new role as Overseer of the Fisheries in the summer of 1879 he found that the Government was without a vessel for particular assignment to the Fisheries Service. Consequently, for the 1879 and 1880 seasons he was obliged to travel on the vessel NAPOLEON

detailed to Marine and Lighthouse duty. This was a most unsatisfactory situation for the Fisheries Service and one that was deplored strongly in Commander Wakeham's first two Annual Reports to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries. His first Annual Report stated, in part:

" I have the honor herewith to tender you my first report on the state of the Fisheries in my Division for the season just closed. As I was only appointed to the position during the summer and have not yet had it in my power to visit all the districts under my supervision, I shall not attempt to make an extended report.....

I trust that next season I may be in a position to say that I have visited the entire coast; it will be impossible to do this unless the Department sees fit to furnish me with a suitable vessel to replace the one lost in 1878. It is absolutely necessary that a vessel be furnished for this service.....the extent and value of our fisheries and the fact that a large number of foreign vessels pass almost the entire open season in our waters, would of itself alone justify our Government in having a Fisheries Protection Vessel always present in the Gulf during the fishing seasonIt is impossible to combine the Fisheries Service with that of Lighthouses as has been tried this season..."

Appended to Commander Wakeham's first Annual Report are tables of information of much interest to Gaspeians. The following is typical:

VESSELS OUTWARDS FOR SEA FROM PORT OF PERCÉ WITH FISH -1879

| Name | Tons | Registered | Bound | Owner | Crew |
|----------------------|------|------------|--------------------|--------------|------|
| IDEAL | 65 | GASPE | BARBADOS | JOS. CASS | 5 |
| COLONEL ELLSWORTH | 78 | PICTOU | BARBADOS | TH. SAVAGE | 6 |
| BOLINA | 82 | JERSEY | CIVITIA VECCHIA | ED. VAUTIER | 5 |
| HEMATOPE | 76 | JERSEY | BRISTOL | C.R.C. | 5 |
| MERCINE | 97 | PERCÉ | BARBADOS | TH. SAVAGE | 6 |
| TICKLER | 76 | JERSEY | CEPORTO | C.R.C. | 6 |
| ORIGIN | 59 | JERSEY | CIVITIA VECCHIA | F.S. SKOLLET | 5 |
| ZINGARA | 174 | JERSEY | BAHIA | WM. LE BROcq | 7 |
| SNOWDROP | 149 | JERSEY | PERNAMBUCO | J. BUTEL | 8 |

From a table of vessels outbound in the same year from the Port of New Carlisle, listing more than thirty ships, are to be found the following owners: J.P. LE GRAND; R. STEELE; R.H. MONTGOMERY; ROBERT FAIR; R. BIJOUETTE; LE BOUTILLIER BROTHERS; CHARLES ROBIN CO. (C.R.C.)

The destinations of these vessels included: BARBADOS; RIO DE JANEIRO; PERNAMBUCO; JERSEY; FRENCH ST. PETERS; BOSTON; BAHIA; NEWFOUNDLAND.

Among the Gaspé vessels engaged in the coasting trade along the North Shore of the Gulf reference is found to the PROVIDENCE, 48 tons, CAPTAIN DAVID LAW of New Carlisle, the WOLVERINE, 40 tons, CAPTAIN E. ADAMS of Gaspé, the FLYING FISH, 48 tons, CAPTAIN RICHARD MILLER of Gaspe and the SPEEDY, 55 tons, CAPTAIN BEN ASLIN of Gaspe.

Though whaling was in decline by the year 1879, it was reported that the whalers of Gaspe Bay had killed thirteen whales and obtained 8015 gallons of whale oil.

Particular mention was made in Commander Wakeham's first report of the success of fishermen from Douglstown fishing out of McDonald's Cove, Anticosti Island. It was stated that:

"They are among the best fishermen on the coast and particularly thrifty".

Notwithstanding his urgent pleas to the Government for a vessel to be used exclusively in the Fisheries Service, Commander Wakeham had to wait until the season of 1881 before he took command of LA CANADIENNE. Meanwhile in his second Annual Report for 1880 he noted that there had been a significant decline in the South Shore fishery. Many fishermen had left the Coast to move to the West; others were seeking their livelihood in the lumber camps of Pabos and Magdalen River in Gaspesia and in those of the Ottawa Valley and Michigan, U.S.A. Summer gales of unusual violence had wrought havoc with shipping and fishing in the Gulf. A number of Gaspé's fishing and trading schooners had been driven ashore in English Bay, Anticosti Island, the steamship OTTER and the barque PIMLICO had been wrecked off West Point and Ellis Bay, Anticosti, respectively. His report strongly recommended the laying of submarine, communications cables to Anticosti, the Magdalen Islands and the North Shore and that a powerful salvage tug be stationed at Gaspé where a floating dock or marine slip should be provided for the repair of vessels.

With the season of 1881 Commander Wakeham was finally able to command his proper patrol vessel and establish a pattern of voyages for fisheries protection. It will be the aim of Part II of this account to recall his subsequent career and the highlights of his work and significant accomplishments.