

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

JAMES MacPHERSON LEMOINE VISITS GASPESIA

Sir James MacPherson LeMoine, 1825-1912, illustrious lawyer, historian and author, traced his descent from ancestors that came to Québec from the Rouen district of France. His mother was Julie Anne, daughter of Daniel MacPherson. MacPherson had emigrated to the American colonies from Invernesshire, Scotland, and had come to Gaspesia as a Loyalist at the time of the American Revolution. James MacPherson LeMoine, as a lad, visited with his maternal grand-father at Douglastown and Point St.Peter whence his successful fishery was conducted. Later, Daniel MacPherson was the Seignior of Crane Island, off Montmagny, Qué.

Admitted to the Québec Bar in 1850, James MacPherson LeMoine, in 1856, married Harriet Mary, the daughter of Edward Atkinson. His remarkable career as a writer began circa 1860 and from then onward for almost 50 years he continued to publish, in both English and French, the series of historical and other works that are his legacy.

President for several terms of the Literary and Historical Society of Québec, he was also chosen to be President of the Royal Society of Canada. He was awarded a knighthood in 1894 and received the degree of Doctor of Civil Laws from Bishop's University.

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY presents here accounts by Le Moine of visits to New Carlisle and Gaspé.

Ken Annett

CALDWELL MANOR - NEW CARLISLE

THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF GASPE OF YESTERDAY IS DRAWN FROM THE WRITINGS OF JAMES MacPHERSON LE MOINE IN HIS BOOK, "THE EXPLORATIONS OF JONATHAN OLDBUCK, F.G.S.Q. IN EASTERN LATITUDES", PUBLISHED IN 1889.

AT THE TIME OF LE MOINE'S VISIT TO NEW CARLISLE IN 1887 THE DESCENDENTS OF ITS LOYALIST FOUNDERS COULD RECALL THE PERSONS AND EVENTS OF ITS SETTLEMENT IN 1784. TODAY, A CENTURY LATER, THESE RECORDED RECOLLECTIONS ARE A PRECIOUS BRIDGE ACROSS THAT WIDE RIVER OF ELAPSED TIME.

After many peregrinations, here I am again at the loved old home of King George's faithful adherents, the United Empire Loyalists of 1783, New Carlisle, Baie des Chaleurs, on my way from Paspébiac. After wishing success to my excellent Boniface, Mynheer Clemens, whose cosy hostelry crowns the heights which overhang the fishy realm of the warlike but not over-prosperous Paspéjacks, I have admired the airy position of Ex-Lieut.-Governor' Robitaille's roomy mansion, as well as the stately structure in process of erection by his brother, the Inspector of Customs. Soon other matters engaged my attention.

"Are you not the gentleman who hunts up old manuscripts, deserted castles, ancient ruins, shipwrecks, histories, legends of every kind?", was one of the first greetings extended to me.

I looked up and found myself confronted by a jolly, round-faced New Carlislian holding in his arms a bouncing two year old baby, a credit to the kingdom of the herring and cod, and whom he appeared to care for as the apple of his eye.

"Well", I said, "go on. Suppose I should, do you know of any law to prevent?".

"Not by any means, Squire", he briskly replied, and the jolly "pater familias" went on to inform me that I was but a few yards from the oldest house in the settlement, the identical

log house built more than one hundred years previous by the Land Surveyor, Vondenvelden, who had been employed by the Government to lay out in square lots the site of the future shiretown, New Carlisle, now the "chef-lieu" of the populous County of Bonaventure. Its dimensions were 30 feet by 20 feet, with a wing at the east end. The dwelling, he said, originally had but one story, with a mansard roof, on which a diminutive story had been added- a species of attic or cock-loft lit by two diminutive windows two feet square. The house has quite an historic interest; here lived occasionally brave Lieut-Governor Cox, about 1774 (sic). In the spacious cellar, which can store 500 bushels of potatoes, may yet be seen a recess in which he may have kept his wine. A strolling Court was held here at times by the Imperial magnate (i.e. Cox) At the east end of the dwelling a spot is shown where of yore existed a whipping post; tradition mentions the whipping there of a blackman for some delinquency or other. Governor Cox, however, sojourned also at another house near by. You may yet see the solid chairs said to have belonged to him at Caldwell Manor.

"Go on, my friend", I chimed in; "I know something about the defunct Governor. The Lieutenant-Governorship of Gaspé was one of the many sinecures which aroused the patriotic ire of the Papineay Party in the old House of Assembly. In 1821 the House tried to abolish the sinecure on the grounds that the incumbent was often an absentee from the Province. The salary had been reduced from L 1000 to L 300. In 1825 it refused to pass this item in the Civil List. In 1831 Lord Aylmer alluded to it in his message to the House, expressing the hope, "that if the place is abolished, the incumbent will be idemnified". Nicholas Cox, a distinguished British officer at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, under Wolfe, had been conspicuous by his gallantry at the blockade of Québec in 1775; he had served at Louisbourg and commanded a Company of the 47th at the seige of Québec in 1759. Sir Guy Carleton had named him to his staff. In the Lieut.-Governorship of Gaspé he had succeeded a Mr. Elliott. He was pensioned in 1780 on account of his infirmities and had for his successor Col. Francis Le Maistre, Adjutant-General of the Provincial Militia, who resided at Percé and died in Ste.Famille

street, Québec on the 13th February, 1805".

The old Québec GAZETTE records the death and military funeral of Lieut.-Governor Cox who died 8th January, 1794, at the ripe old age of 70.

"I feel much interest in what you state; but do not forget that Lieut.-Governor Cox was also Superintendent of the Labrador Fisheries and spent large sums of Imperial money in building up King George's pet colony at New Carlisle".

Mr. C. (for such must be his name) then offered to escort me to the historic house, which after the days of Governor Cox and the departure of the Land Surveyor, Vondenvelden, and his successor, McDonald, came into the possession of a U.E.Loyalist of the name of Caldwell, a man of note and substance in the State of New York, in 1783, whose property was confiscated and who was glad to avail himself of the royal bounty in wild lands offered to the expatriated loyalists by the Sovereign of Great Britain, George III. I took advantage of the offer of my new cicerone. Soon, both of us were ensconced within the sacred precincts of the "oldest House", the Caldwell Manor. We had not long to wait and were courteously greeted by two very intelligent and active damsels with an unmistakeable Presbyterian air in all their belongings.

They told me that their father was born in New York and accompanied his father to New Carlisle, just then laid out for settlers by Government. The house had been but little altered since its construction. On my noticing panels all around the room to a height of about three feet, they informed me that instead of lath and plaster partitions such as I saw now above the panels, there were square pickets with canvas and paper to cover them in early days. The ceiling had an unmistakeable antique aspect; the "wide-throated" chimney-place in the west gable had been removed, but the panels hiding its nakedness still remained.

I saw the historic chairs and felt like a Lieut.-Governor on seating myself on the highest. Two old hand-painted China tea cups were shown, of a most antique pattern; one was cracked. I was

TO GASPE BASIN ON THE "HIRONDELLE"

It seems particularly fitting to close out this second volume of GASPE OF YESTERDAY with the following account from James MacPherson Le Moine's "LEGENDS OF THE ST. LAWRENCE" in which he recounts a visit to Gaspé Basin. His apt description of the scene, in both sun and shadow, evokes fond memories in those fortunate enough to have grown up on the shores of beautiful Gaspé Bay.

With the closing shades of evening the "HIRONDELLE" is cleaving her way through the sparkling waters of Gaspé Bay, furrowed by Jacques Cartier in 1535; by James Wolfe in 1758, and by our own Prince of Wales in 1860, and by scores of noted navigators and by tourists of many nations.

Our ever watchful Commodore is giving directions to old Carleton not to hug too closely that treacherous sandy spit on which Commander Orlebar, R.N. ran aground in August 1860 his big ship "HERO", bearing Albert of Wales and his fortunes, much to the surprise of the old salt. Now we have shot past the light schooner anchored on the edge of the bank; soon we shall be in the narrows abreast of the R.C. church and flag staff. A few minutes more our anchor will be dropped past Veit's wharf. O'er the lofty fir groves, casting on the waters their dark shadow, the Queen of Night is shedding her mild radiance. It is half-past eight p.m. "Twenty and a half" suggests Mac of the Isles. But what does that signify? Sanford Fleming and his enlightened, new-fangled scheme be diddled! The Gaspesians would never know when it was time for them to rise in the morning by his "thirteen and fourteen hour system".

The last cormorant, raised on his black wings, has gone to rest up the bay.

The American consul has hauled down the "stars and stripes" at sunset.

An impressive silence reigns on the deep, placid, lapsing waters, broken only by the faint tinkle of a cow bell, the bearer of which is browsing over dewy meadows, commanded by Fort Ramsay, ready, as of yore, to belch out a salute should Albert of Wales, or any of his royal

brothers again drop anchor in Gaspé's historic bay; its cannon, like diminutive beasts of prey crouching in the dim twilight, dot the apex of the hill, which overshadows the warehouses on the shore.

Commander Wakeham's steam cruiser is anchored in the Basin; a Cadiz brigantine is moored at the wharf to exchange her cargo of salt for "merchantable codfish"; her wet sails are not yet furled, a passing shower having ruffled the bay that afternoon. Let us have our cheroot and Scotch night-cap and then off to sweet oblivion, and the "balmy restorer" in our cabin, for Gaspé Basin is the kingdom par excellence of the drowsy God.

At dawn we were startled by a voice shouting from a yawl which came alongside, "Mackerel !. Fresh, quite fresh from the bay !", whilst a flood of purple light streamed through the open skylight. It was the peerless orb of day invading our quarters. Dressing hurriedly, I rushed on deck to witness one of the grandest sights Gaspé Bay has in store, a sunrise on the waters on a bright summer morning. It was truly superb. To the south-east the long, yellowish spit of Sandy Beach, stretching out more than three miles down the bay; on the opposite side, the shore trending far away with a background of pine and fir clad hills, dim in the distance, with here and there a fisherman's hut and boats on the strand, or a farm house in the center of a green meadow, or a waving grainfield awaiting a few more warm touches of Old Sol to don its golden mantle. Far away I would discern the diminutive black hull of the light-ship, intended to guide the mariner round the edge of the bank. I walked on shore, ascended the heights, and took in, to the best of my ability, every feature of the fair landscape, and then looked around for busy husbandmen at work in the early morn, but Morpheus, I found, was the king of this happy land; there was none to be seen.

"What a delightful haven of rest," I thought, "Gaspé must be for an overworked, sleepless, heat and malaria tormented New Yorker!" Exertion, commercial activity, seem here out of place, an anomaly, a delusion, a snare.

I met one of those distressed New Yorkers. He had just returned from bobbing for mackerel in a boat where he had been since sunrise,

with an ample umbrella to intercept the rays of the sun beating on his devoted head; he had caught two mackerel and was happy.

"What a glorious spot", said he to me, "to recuperate exhausted nature. No noise, no war telegrams, no bank troubles, no corporation frauds, no boodlers! No presidential elections! Sleep, bracing sea air, incomparable landscapes!"

The inhabitants I admire hugely; there indeed you have character, though some may construe it of a negative kind. They rise when it suits; they do not go about nervously, like us. No feverish haste with them, no rush to catch the train. They look to the sea more than to the land for their daily subsistence. I have made a special study of them. The elder folks seem as if they could set and smoke all day; they gossip, pleasantly at times, about their neighbour's affairs, take a walk or crack mild jokes when the sun is down; above all, they retire early, sleep sound and long. Happy fellows!

Even their dumb animals, I fancy, but perhaps it is only a fancy-catch the pervading influence and get into easy ways. Our boarding-house dog barks in a subdued, measured manner; the fastest gait I have detected in their horses is a quiet shuffle between a trot and an amble; the cows chime in with the rest, and sport in the meadows a diminutive bell; roosters are objected to in the settlement, their loud crowing is calculated to awaken the old dowagers at dawn.

I should imagine that worthy old Lieut.-Governor, Cox, in 1774, instead of horses on his carriage, when he travelled from the shire-town, New Carlisle, to Gaspé Basin or Percé, had a span of sturdy, young, sober-minded oxen, like that illustrious Roi d'Yvetot :-

"Quatre boeufs, d'un pas majestueux et lent,
Promenaient dans Paris, le monarque indolent."

Uncle Sam's earnest, humorous theory of Gaspesians tickled me, I must confess. It brought back to my mind those dreamy personages so graphically delineated by de Quincy.

I have been told that great travellers had occasionally seen queer sights in the Kingdom of the Cod and Mackerel. The very next

day I learned of a strange "modus operandi" which in times of yore obtained in the treatment of criminals: it happened some time after Confederation and came to light in the following manner.

The Government, in order to correct some abuses which had crept into the administration of justice and especially in the discipline of the prisons, named a commissioner. On his arrival at one of the jails he found the jailor, on the Court House steps, smoking a gigantic, Dutch meerchaum, seated in an easy chair; the following dialogue took place:

The jailor: "Mr. Commissioner, I am happy to make your acquaintance; you are sent by the Government, it is said, to straighten up matters generally. Won't you step in and see how we manage here; my turnkey is out on the banks catching his winter supply of cod. The jail is well patronized; we have eighteen prisoners to look after, all in capital health.

"Well", said the Commissioner, "let me see them".

"Are you in a hurry?" replied the genial jailor, "Could you not call after sunset? I will have them all in attendance in apple-pie order".

"Well, not easily; in fact I must see the jail and its inmates right off, to make up my report", retorted the official.

"Sorry Your Honour should have so little leisure; the fact is, when the weather is fine, I turn out my captives at eight a.m. sharp; they take a lounge around the country, catch a few fresh trout for my dinner; at sundown all return safe to their quarters. I treat them well and they do not mind being deprived of their evenings' amusements. I wanted to change this practice when I was appointed but the County Member interfered, he had a friend to look after. Wait until evening; they are looking up my two cows which strayed away in the woods, and I promise you to trot out every man jack of the eighteen." Tableau !

The Commodore got the yacht under way next morning, saluted as he sailed past the "JAMBOREE", Messrs Garland and Barley Bland's trim yacht, lying at anchor higher than Bayfield House.

The "HORONDELLE" then spread her white wings for Québec.....