

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE LIFE AND TIMES

OF

ABBÉ JOSEPH MATHURIN BOURG

1744-1797

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE ABBE JOSEPH MATHURIN BOURG

It is in the conviction that awareness of the background and career of those who played a distinctive role in Gaspesia lends colour and meaning to our heritage that CASPE OF YESTERDAY attempts to recall the remarkable life and times of the Abbé Joseph Mathurin Bourg. Though his name and memory is most deeply associated with the community of Tracadieche or Carleton that was his home base for the twenty-two years from 1773 until 1795, he was widely known along the length of the Bay Chaleur shore from Gaspé Bay to Restigouche. And while it was to the Acadian settlers of Bay Chaleur and the Micmac Indians of Restigouche that his primary duty lay, his work and travels led him to meet and know the Loyalist settlers and the early Lieutenant-Governor of the District of Gaspé, Major Nicholas Cox and other English persons. With his fellow Gaspesians he experienced and shared the trials and tribulations of pioneer life in Bay Chaleur, including the dark days of the American Revolutionary War when American privateers raided and looted from Percé to Restigouche. And like many another Gaspesian who has been obliged to leave the Coast and live elsewhere he lived only for two years after he was removed from Carleton by his Bishop.

BOURG FAMILY BACKGROUND

Joseph Mathurin Bourg was born at Rivière-aux-Canards, near Grand Pré, Acadia (Nova Scotia) on June 9, 1744, the son of Michel and Anne Hebert Bourg. His paternal grandfather, Alexandre Bourg, a notary and King's attorney, was a prominent Acadian. His paternal grandmother was Marguerite Melanson, the daughter of equally prominent Acadian settlers. Joseph Mathurin, the eldest son, had younger brothers, Charles and Pierre and younger sisters, Madeleine, Victoire and Marie. Up until the traumatic events of 1755 in Grand Pré the Bourg family enjoyed a happy farm life in the beautiful "Evangeline" countryside of Acadia.

THE ACADIANS DEPORTED

The events leading to the massive deportation of the Acadians

have been the subject of much historical writing and continue to be debated. In brief, the deportation order was proclaimed on September 2nd., 1755 by Colonel Lawrence and his aides, Winslow and Murray and enforced by their troops between September 10th and December 20th. Some 6000 Acadians, men women and children were forced from their homes, loaded onto transports, and sent off into exile to such American colonies as Virginia, Maryland, Carolina and Pennsylvania. They were not welcomed in some colonies and were sent off across the Atlantic to England. Some were lost at sea in the sinking of transports.

The family of Joseph Mathurin Bourg was destined for Virginia but ended up in England early in 1756. There they remained in exile for the next seven years. During that time the mother, Anne Hebert Bourg, died and the children acquired a step-mother through the marriage of their father, Michel with Frigitte Malin. If any aspect of exile in England could be classified as positive, it was that Joseph Mathurin Bourg acquired that knowledge of the English language that would later prove to be so useful to him in his dealings with the English element in Gaspesia.

REPATRIATION TO FRANCE.

In May, 1763, following upon the end of the conflict between England and France that had been marked by the British Conquest of New France, the Bourg family was repatriated to France. Sailing from Bristol they landed at St.Malo and for the next three years made their home at St. Suliac. There and subsequently at St.Servan the children of the Bourg family resumed their education. By 1767 Joseph Mathurin was a student of philosophy at Paris and was developing an orientation for the Church. He was accepted as a student in theology by the St.Esprit Fathers. In 1771 he returned from France to his native Acadia and in the following year, on September 19, 1772, was ordained a priest of the Roman Catholic Church in Montreal.

START OF MISSIONARY CAREER

In appointing Joseph Mathurin Bourg to missionary work in the vast territory of Acadia and the Bay Chaleur, Bishop Briand had

taken into account, no doubt, the background and unique experience of the new priest. To serve the dispersed and far-flung Acadian communities in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Bay Chaleur would require all the vigour and enthusiasm of the youthful missionary whose memory burned with the experience of his Acadian people. By the autumn of 1773 he had established residence at Carleton and had performed his first clerical acts in the Acadian settlement of Bonaventure. At Carleton, the former Tracadieche, he found the chapel built there earlier by the Jesuit missionary, Father de la Brosse and it was close by this chapel that he established the residence that would be his home base for more than two decades. Though travel over his vast Mission would take him away from Carleton and Gaspesia for extended periods it was Carleton that he considered his home and its beautiful blend of sea and mountains that he came to cherish as a true Gaspesian.

A FAMILY REUNITED

The year 1774 must have been one of great personal joy for the Abbé Bourg as he was reunited with members of his family. They reached Bay Chaleur from the Island of Jersey in one of the ships of the Charles Robin Co - a company that had been engaged in the Bay Chaleur fishery since 1764. His brother, Charles, would marry at Carleton with Mlle Theodiste Savoye; his sister Victoire would become the wife of Michel Vincent Arsenault and his sister, Marie Mucie would marry Isaie Bernard. His father, Michel Bourg would die at Carleton four years after his arrival there.

PRIOR MISSIONARY SERVICE IN BAY CHALEUR

The GASPE OF YESTERDAY account of the NEW RELATION OF GASPESIA recalled the life and work of the Recollet Father Chrestin LeClercq (1641-1697). Father LeClercq was on the Gaspé Coast 100 years before the Abbé Bourg but, even then, he was not the first missionary to work in the District. He had been preceded in Gaspesia by earlier Recollets and Jesuits. Thus, as early as the 1620's Recollet missionaries served at Percé and other Gaspesian settlements to be followed in the 1630's by the Jesuits. In 1635

the Jesuits Turgis and Du Marché, based at Miscou, had jurisdiction in Gaspesia. They were followed by Fathers Dolbeau, Richard, Lyonne and Buteux. Just prior to the British Conquest of New France in 1759-60 the Franciscian Fathers, Etienne and Ambrois were serving the Restigouche Micmac Indian Mission at the head of Bay Chaleur. In 1771 Father Bonaventure Charpentier was at Bonaventure and about that time a chapel was built at Carleton by the Jesuit Father de la Brosse and a church raised at Restigouche. It was the chapel built by Father de la Brosse that the Abbé Joseph Mathurin Bourg found on his arrival at Carleton and near which he established his home.

ACADIANS OF BAY CHALEUR

Reference has been made in other accounts of GASPE OF YESTERDAY to the arrival in Bay Chaleur of a significant number of Acadian families following upon the fall of the great French fortress of Louisbourg to the British and the occupation of Ile St. Jean (P.E.I.) These unfortunate exiles found temporary shelter about the French military and naval base near Cross Point but were displaced once again when that base was raided and captured by British navy and army forces. Several hundred of them were rounded up and sent off by sea to Halifax. Others found refuge in such places as the estuary of the River Bonaventure and in the forests of Gaspesia. To this difficult and distressing experience of the early Acadian families was added the long and frustrating delay in obtaining legal title to the lands that they settled and cleared. It was to these people that early missionaries such as the Abbé Joseph Mathurin Bourg brought not only spiritual comfort but practical support in their struggle to secure the lands that were so vital to their very survival.

ABBE BOURG'S VAST MISSION

Vast as was the District of Gaspé, in and by itself, it was but part of the overall Mission that was served initially, and for many years, by the Abbé Bourg. At a time when roads were practically non-existent he travelled to the dispersed Acadian settlements in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia as well as the Bay Chaleur shore from Gaspé Bay to Restigouche. The toil and dangers of his travels were

incessant. Not until 1786 did he get some relief by the appointment of the Abbé Antoine Girouard who located at Caraquet on the south shore of Bay Chaleur and served the Acadian settlements of New Brunswick until 1790. The arrival in Nova Scotia of the Capucin Father Jones, an Irishman, provided relief to the Abbé Bourg for the Acadians of that province.

THE WINDS OF WAR

Only a year after the Abbé Bourg was reunited with members of his family in Bay Chaleur the first shots of the American Revolutionary War were fired at Lexington. For the next seven years the winds of war, on land and at sea, would trouble the far-flung Mission territory of the Abbé Bourg. The correspondence of Lieutenant-Governor Nicholas Cox, Felix O'Hara, Governor Haldimand, Charles Robin, John Shoolbred and others contain dramatic accounts of the raids in Bay Chaleur of American privateers. The vital fishery was disrupted, trade brought to a virtual standstill, settlements looted and the Gaspesian settlers put in fear of their lives.

Another aspect of the war may not be as well known. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia American agents infiltrated the Acadian settlements and Indian tribes in a serious attempt to promote a rising against the British administration. The Acting Governor of Nova Scotia, Arbuthnot, was so alarmed by this threat that he appealed to Sir Guy Carleton, Governor of Québec for help. Despite the fact that Carleton was faced with an even more immediate threat from the invading American armies of Montgomery and Arnold, he responded to the Nova Scotia appeal by arranging for the Abbé Bourg to meet with the Acadians and Indians to calm spirits and to remind them of the long-range benefit of continuing loyalty to the British Crown. Though the Abbé Bourg had many reasons not to feel sympathy for the British cause, he accepted Carleton's request and was so successful in his efforts to ensure the loyalty of the Acadians and Indians that he was commended to the Secretary of State in London by the Nova Scotia Governor, Sir Richard Hughes. Tradition holds that, in gratitude, the Governor granted him Heron Island and some four miles of land along Bay Chaleur at Charlo, N.E.

THE DEMON RUM

In recalling earlier days in Gaspesia and identifying some of the serious social problems of those times, the "eternal song" of the old sea captain of Robert Louis Stevenson's "TREASURE ISLAND" seems to be appropriate :

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest -
 Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum !
 Drink and the devil had done for the rest -
 Yo-ho-ho , and a bottle of rum !

Witness the following remarks in a report of the Abbé Fours:

" I am presently at Percé on my return from Rivière-aux-Penards. This is a place where the work of the Lord suffers greatly from liquor. Every year I have given strong warnings about this but have seen little change. The inhabitants are French and Irish fishermen. One Irishman, nominally Catholic as in many cases, was drowned two days ago while drunk. I ordered that he be buried outside of the cemetery and forbade the Irish to attend. It is terrible ! This is the third case this summer of one perishing from liquor."

Again, in a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Nicholas Cox, he wrote:

" Despite the orders that Your Excellency has given to prevent traders from selling liquor to the Indians, they all continue to do so and the Indians have never been so ruined by liquor as now. At Christmas they came from Restigouche to Nouvelle where they were able to obtain all the liquor they wanted from one trader alone. Being all drunk, they had disputes, quarrels and fights...it was surprising that there were no murders.

His Excellency can be advised that if more strict and severe orders are not enforced it is certain that many murders will occur. Most of the Amalecite Indians from the River St. John are now at Restigouche and they are very bad actors when they are drunk. I hope that His

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Excellency will give this his attention and take the steps necessary to check such disorder. The poor folk of Nouvelle tremble in fear for their lives when they have among them scores of drunken Indians who carouse throughout entire nights..."

INDIAN EDUCATION

His own family background and his personal experience of schooling in exile made the Abbé Bourg keenly aware of the benefits of education. In particular he was convinced that the future of Indian youth could be improved through education and he was open to consider any means to that end. In England a SOCIETY FOR THE PROPOGATION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE INDIANS had been organized and counted among its Canadian Directors Governor Carleton, Chief Justice Ludlow, Judge Allen and, in the District of New Brunswick, the Hon. George Leonard. Though the Society was Protestant by foundation an approach was made to the Abbé Bourg for his recommendations. He was subsequently offered an initial annual grant of £ 500 sterling which he employed in opening Indian schools at Restigouche and Madawaska in the year 1788.

CHARLES DUGAS OF CARLETON

In the article MEET SOME GASPESIANS OF 150 YEARS AGO it was recalled that one of the residents of Carleton introduced to Joseph Hamel, the Surveyor and Explorer, was the eighty year old Widow Hypolite Landry. Her father, Charles Dugas, had been one of the pioneer Acadian settlers of Carleton along with Benjamin Allain, Joseph LeBlanc and others. It was Charles Dugas who assumed responsibility for religious services at Carleton on the many occasions when the Abbé Bourg was absent on missionary travels. Charles Dugas lived to the age of 100 years and on his death in 1801 one of his contemporaries wrote:

"...He was the best educated person of
the community; his conduct was ever above

reproach; an upright man of great integrity and exemplary piety; he left behind him a memory of great virtue..."

TOIL AND TROUBLE

With the departure of the Abbé Antoine Girouard from Caraquet in 1790 the Abbé Bourg again had to assume responsibility for the New Brunswick Mission as well as that of Gaspesia. In the winter of that year he spent some time at Bonaventure and from there he had to report the sad loss of the church by fire to his Bishop. He noted that the settlers were at work to provide lumber for the rebuilding of the church.

An even more serious concern that troubled the Abbé Bourg and his Acadian parishioners in Bay Chaleur was their inability to obtain legal title to the lands they had settled. Their concern was heightened by the parallel claims made by such well-placed officials as Hugh Finlay, Major Samuel Holland, John Collins and others. Even the Abbé Bourg had been unable to obtain title to the land that he occupied at Carleton. As recalled in a number of issues of GASPE OF YESTERDAY this situation would persist for many years until the Legislative Assembly of Québec was moved to appoint the Gaspé Land Claims Commission of 1819-1820.

To compound the toil and trouble of the time, even Nature seemed to conspire against Gaspesia. In 1791 the Abbé Bourg wrote:

"...We see only misery in the Bay (Chaleurs) this year owing to the failure of the salmon fishery and the hunt. The cod fishery has been mediocre but the harvest is promising..."

The climax of the Abbé Bourg's troubles was the eruption of controversy between him and his parishioners of Carleton. An initial dispute over pews in the church escalated into personal attacks on the Abbé Bourg and community harassment of his house-keeper. The situation was reminiscent of that experienced earlier at Carleton by Father de la Brosse which had prompted Abbé Bourg

to report to the Bishop:

"...les plus fort vice des Acadiens est la médisance
et meme les plus noires calomnies..."

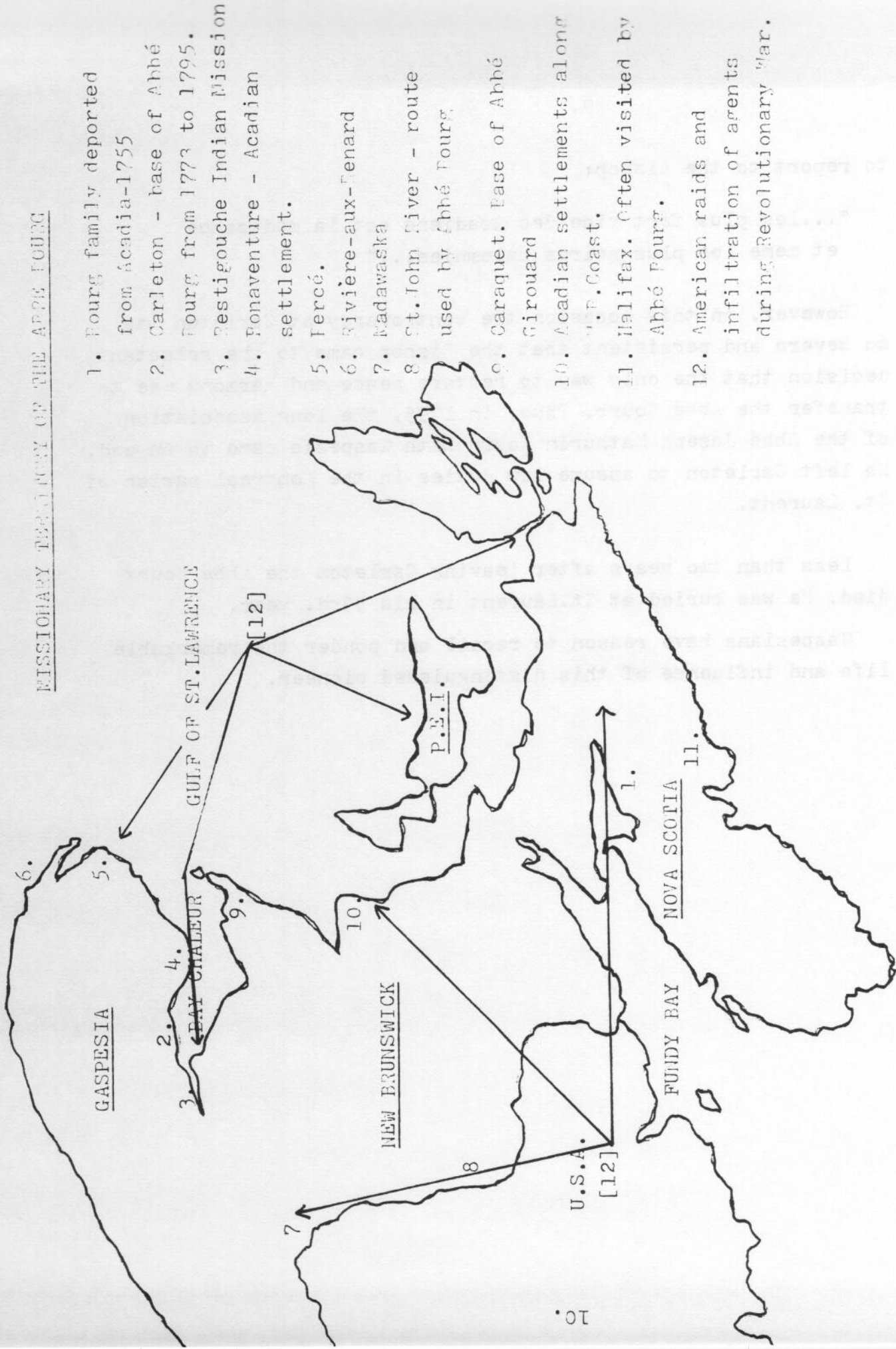
However, on this occasion the controversy at Carleton was so severe and persistent that the Bishop came to the reluctant decision that the only way to restore peace and harmony was to transfer the Abbé Bourb. Thus, in 1795, the long association of the Abbé Joseph Mathurin Bourb with Gaspesia came to an end. He left Carleton to assume new duties in the Montreal parish of St. Laurent.

Less than two years after leaving Carleton the Abbé Bourb died. He was buried at St. Laurent in his 53rd. year.

Gaspesians have reason to recall and ponder the remarkable life and influence of this distinguished pioneer.



MISSIONARY TERRITORY OF THE ABBE FOURG



1. Fourg family deported from Acadia-1755
2. Carleton - base of Abbé Fourg from 1773 to 1795.
3. Restigouche Indian Mission.
4. Ponaventure - Acadian settlement.
5. Fercé.
6. Rivière-aux-Tenard
7. Madawaska
8. St. John River - route used by Abbé Fourg.
9. Caraquet. Base of Abbé Girouard
10. Acadian settlements along N.P.Coast.
11. Halifax. Often visited by Abbé Fourg.
12. American raids and infiltration of agents during Revolutionary War.

DATA FROM CENSUS REPORT OF BAY OF CHALEUR - TONAVENTURE- 1765NAMES OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Will Mitchell for Alex.M'Kenzie | Ps. Duguée |
| Robt Guillin for Moore and Finlay | Jean Cronier |
| Alexis Landry | Mathieu Brasseux |
| Benjamin Allain | Jacques Huard |
| Jos. Arseneau | Joanis Chapadeau |
| Charles Buzot (Eujold) | George La Roque |
| P. Poirier | Pre. Brasseux |
| Jos. Bernard | J-M. Dugué |
| Olivier Leger | Jos. LeBlanc |
| Paul Buzot (Eujold) | Am. Pabin |
| Flacide Buzot " | Charles Dugas |
| Ambroise Commeau | Jean Arsenau |
| Jos. Bourg (the Abbé) | Fr. La Roque |
| Amant Buzau (Eujold) | Charles La Roque |
| Jos. LeBlanc, pere. | Pre. Langlois |
| Jos. Baudrot, pere. | Ps. Huart |
| Amand Buzau, fils (Eujold) | Benjamin LeBlanc |
| Léon Roussy (of Paspebiac) | Wm. Van Felson |
| Louis Dunié (Dunys) | Jos. Footmen |
| Louis Erido | |

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|------------------|---------------|
| HOUSES.....40 | OXEN.....5 |
| MEN.....32 | COWS.....17 |
| WOMEN.....20 | SHEEP..... 1 |
| BOYS.....97 | HORSES..... 7 |
| GIRLS..... 9 | |
| SERVANTS..... 5 | |
| STRANGERS..... 4 | |