

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

PORT WINE AND SEA WATER

The racking voyage of the Brig "ACORN";
Captain John Humphrey, Master, from
Oporto, Portugal to Paspebiac, Bay
Chaleur, in August and September of
1844.

KEN ANNETT

PORT WINE AND SEA WATER

The first week of August, 1844, found the Brig, ACORN, a vessel of 107 tons burden, far from her home port of Leith, Scotland, in the seaport of Oporto, Portugal. There, a cargo of port wine, brandy, olive oil and cork was being loaded for the transatlantic voyage to Montreal on the St. Lawrence. In preparation for sailing her Master, Captain John Humphrey, his Mate, James Lyall and seamen, including Andrew Clarke and Smith Manson, who would later testify on behalf of their fellow crew members, were busy checking ACORN for seaworthiness. They later swore under oath that at the time of sailing the ACORN was, in all respects, sound, well-equipped, well-manned and ready for sea.

OUT TO SEA

It was August 12th when ACORN, her cargo complete and hatches well sealed, left Oporto and proceeded down the winding and fiordlike Douro river estuary to the open sea. Her crew were leaving behind them a city steeped in history and world famous as the export center of the "port" wine produced in the Douro district of Portugal. The city of Oporto had, over centuries, experienced occupation of the Romans, the Visigoths, the Moors and the Christian Princes of Portugalia. It had seen the British forces of the Duke of Wellington when, in 1809, the occupying French forces of Napoleon had been put to flight. Next to Lisbon it was the second most important city and seaport of Portugal.

INTO THE ATLANTIC

On emerging from the sheltered waters of the Douro estuary, ACORN encountered immediately rough and tempestuous weather. The vessel made some water but not more than could be cleared by the pumps. Inspection confirmed that there was no damage to the cargo.

A month out of Oporto, on September 12th, high winds and heavy seas were encountered. The leak increased and now constant labour

ACORN had to be hove to under close reefed sails. About 2:00 a.m. of September 13th a tremendous sea hit the vessel and nearly drove her on her beam ends. The hatches were loosened and sea water thrown among the cargo. When ACORN slowly righted and pumping continued it was observed that salt and wine were now, for the first time, mixed with the water pumped from the hold. The gale continued until September 14th. Only when it moderated could repairs be made to the damaged rigging and sails to permit the vessel to proceed. However, the Brig continued to make much more water than previously and the pumps had to be kept going continuously.

OFF CAPE BRETON

By September 17th the coast of Cape Breton was sighted. Again the wind increased to such force that only a minimum of sail could be carried. The ACORN continued to make a great deal of water and the outfall of her pumps was now highly coloured with wine. With continuing high wind and rough sea and the exhausted condition of the crew, ACORN was in evident peril. Consequently, on September 25th. Captain Humphrey concluded that it would be impossible to continue the planned voyage to Montreal. Course was changed to enter Bay Chaleur and the storm-battered ACORN was finally brought to anchor in the roadstead of Paspébiac.

SURVEY REPORT

The days of the sailing ships abound in records of survey of maritime disaster and loss. In the case of ACORN such a survey was carried out at Paspébiac by the following experienced men:

- . Captain Moses Amice Gibaut, Master Mariner and Master of the Barque, HOMELY, of Jersey.
- . Captain John Piton, Master Mariner and Master of the Brig, SEAFLOWER, of Jersey.

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her parts, with her beams started and the apron forward split in two - all beams started as also outside planking from the timbers which are much decayed..."

Officially, they pronounced ACORN to be completely unseaworthy and incapable of repair. The vessel, they concluded, - "is totally unfit for any purpose of navigation"

VOYAGE END

The visitor to Paspebiac Point in the first week of October, 1844, would have watched the crew of ACORN busy at removing such cargo as remained undamaged and storing it in the warehouses that then, as now, stand on the Point. While record of the fate of the damaged vessel has not been found it is assumed that once her sails, standing and running rigging was salvaged, she was run ashore and broken up. As to her crew it is likely that they returned to Europe on one of the Robin or LeBoutillier ships sailing from Paspebiac.
