

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

SHIPBUILDING

"Build me straight, O worthy Master :
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle : "

From- Henry W.Longfellow

"BUILDING OF THE SHIP"

KEN ANNETT

Of the many aspects of life in Gaspé of Yesterday few are more intriguing and worthy of recall than the building of the many fine vessels that were launched from Gaspesian shipyards in the distant days of "Wooden ships and iron men". Information on shipbuilding activity in Gaspesia is so dispersed in old records that it is doubtful a complete and accurate account will ever emerge. The length of the coastline of Gaspesia and the many sites where shipyards were located contribute to the difficulty of search and recall of the vessels built and launched.

Those familiar with the poetical work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and, in particular with his poem, THE BUILDING OF THE SHIP, will recall how he paid tribute to the importance of shipbuilding in his native New England. In the work of the master shipbuilder, Longfellow saw a parallel to the building of the Ship of State. This was reflected in the ringing lines that concluded his BUILDING OF THE SHIP :

"Thou too, sail on, O Ship of State :
Sail on, O Union, strong and great :
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate !

SPEC HEADLINE

In SPEC, Vol.10, No.3, under the headline, "RSBG MEETS TO DISCUSS BILLS AND BOATS," it was reported:

"...Recognizing the potential development of a future boat building industry on the Gaspé Coast, the Board endorsed the concept of pursuing the establishment of a learning institute for this area which would be a centre of marine technology..."

With reference to this worthy initiative of 1984, GASPE' OF YESTERDAY thought that it might be of interest to reach back in

time some 200 years to consider some relevant Deeds from the archives of the Notary Charles Stewart concerning ships and shipbuilding in Québec and Gaspesia in the closing decades of the 18th century. These Stewart Papers are a rich source of early Gaspesian history as the clients of Charles Stewart included a number of persons resident or active in business in Bay Chaleur- Robert and Annabella Stewart and their sons, Matthew, James, Dugald and Charles; William Vondenvelden; Henry Rimphoff; James Sherar; Louis Dubord; Azariah Pritchard and others.

For the purposes of this article three Deeds have been chosen from a wealth of material. The first is an INDENTURE for an apprentice to the "Art, Trade and Mystery" of ship carpenter. Its quaint wording harks back to the ancient guild system that produced the craftsmen of a still earlier era. Discrepancies of spelling that the reader may note in the actual text of this INDENTURE arise from the fact that the Deed was drawn up on a form that evidently was in common use long before the actual date of the INDENTURE in the year 1787. As a sequel to this INDENTURE the second Deed provides an interesting glimpse into the terms and status of employment of master ship carpenters. It was an Agreement between Henry Rimphoff, Merchant and Trader of Bay Chaleur, with William King and John Black for service at Rimphoff's shipyard in Bay Chaleur. The third and final Deed chosen was the notarial agreement between Matthew Stewart of Bay Chaleur and Captain Francois Boucher which illustrated the relationship between Gaspesian shipbuilding and the commerce of the late 18th Century.

THIS INDENTURE WITNEFFETH, That Dugald Gray, son of the deceased Gilbert Gray, Warfenger in Carolina, hath put him felf, and by thefe Prefents, with the Consent of William Smith, Master of the Sloop, ADVENTURE, doth voluntarily, and of his own free Will and Accord, put himfelf Apprentice to Silas Pearson, Ship Carpenter, to learn his Art, Trade and Mystery, and after the Manner of an Apprentice to ferve him, the said Silas Pearson, from the Day of the Date hereof, for and during, and to the full end and Term of six years next enfuing.

During all which Term the faid Apprentice his faid Master faithfully fhall ferve, his Secrets keep, his lawful Commands every where readily obey. Shall do no Damage to his faid Master, or fee it to be done by others without letting or giving notice thereof to his faid Master. fhall not wafte his faid Master's Goods, nor lend them unlawfully to any. He fhall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the faid Term. At Cards, Dice, or any other unlawful Game he fhall not play, whereby his faid Master may have Damage. With his own Goods, nor the Goods of others, without License from his faid Master fhall neither buy nor fell. He fhall not abfent himfelf Day nor Night from his faid Master's Service without his leave; nor haunt Ale-houfes, Tavernsm or Play-houfes; but in all things behave himfelf as a faithful Apprentice ought to do during the faid Term.

And the faid Master fhall ufe the utmoft of his endeavour to teach or caufe to be taught or inftructed the faid Apprentice in the Trade or Myftery of a Ship Carpenter and procure and provide for him fufficient Meat, Drink and Cloathing, Lodging and Wafhing, fitting an Apprentice during the said Term of fix years, and at the end of Term aforesaid to give unto the said Apprentice a full and compleat Suit of Cloaths and also that he fhall during the time of his apprenticeship give him fufficient Education and instruct him as a Draftsman as far as the Apprentice has capacity to Learn. And also at the End of his apprenticeship a compleat Set of Tools as for an apprentice out of his time is Customary.

And for the true Performance of all and fingular the Covenants and agreements aforesaid, the faid Parties bind themselves unto the other firmly by thefe Prefents.

IN WITNESS whereof the faid Parties have interchangeably fet
their Hands and Seals hereunto.

Dated the Twenty Fourth Day of October in the Twenty Seventh Year
of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord, George The Third, King of
Great Britain, and etc., Annoque Domini, One Thousand Seven Hundred
and Eighty Seven.

Sealed and Delivered
in the Prefence of:

James Rule
Chas. Stewart
Notaries Public

Signed:

Dugald Gray
Silas Pearson
William Smith

THE MASTER SHIP CARPENTER - STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT

The apprentice ship carpenter who completed successfully his
Term of Indenture and served a further term as a Journeyman in
Ship Building, might expect to win recognition, eventually, as a
Master Ship Carpenter. As such his status and terms of employment
might be exemplified by the following Deed of Agreement between
Henry Rimphoff, Merchant Trader of Bay Chaleur in the late 18th
century, and Master Ship Carpenters, William King and John Black.
This Agreement dates from August, 1787.

DEED OF AGREEMENT

This Agreement made, concluded and agreed upon at Québec this
twenty first Day of June in the Year of Our Lord, 1787, Between
Mr. Henry Rimphoff of the Bay of Chaleur, Merchant and Trader, at
present in this City of Québec, of the One Part, and William King
and John Black, at present in this City, Ship Carpenters, of the
other Part.

WITNESSETH,

That the said William King and John Black, each for himself and not
the one for the other Doth, for the Considerations herein after
mentioned, Covenant, Promise and Agree, everyone for himself, to

and with the said Henry Rimp hoff, that they, and each of them, will from and after the First Day of July next go on board such vessel as the said Henry Rimp hoff shall order and appoint for their passage from this City of Québec to the Bay of Chaleur in the Gulph of St. Lawrence and shall continue in said vessel untill their arrival at such place in the said Bay of Chaleur as the said Henry Rimp hoff shall appoint and there remain and abide for an during the space and term of two whole and complete years from the time and at the period the said William King and John Black shall embark on board the vessel appointed and destined for their voyage.

And upon their arrival at Chaleur Bay, as aforesaid, they shall and will at all times constantly, faithfully, justly, honestly, orderly, and according to the best of their abilities, judgment and understanding, exercise themselves and do and perform and faithfully, honestly, justly and orderly behave themselves in the work and occupation of Ship Carpenters and at such other work or service in the way as Ship Carpenters as they, or any of them, shall be capable to do and perform according to the orders and directions of him, the said Henry Rimp hoff or the orders and directions of an Person or Persons properly authorized by him in his Stead.

And Further, they, the said William King and John Black, and each for himself, Covenant, Promises and Agrees that they will and shall with care and attention, oversee, manage and conduct such Person and Persons as may be put under their Charge and shall be careful that the Interest of him, the said Henry Rimp hoff, shall not suffer by their, or any of their misconduct or management of those entrusted under their Charge, so far as they, the said William King and John Black can prevent.

In Consideration of which said Service so to be performed and done by the said William King and John Black, the said Henry Rimp hoff Covenants, Promises and Agrees to and with the said William King and John Black, for himself, his Heirs, Executors and Assigns: That he will, at his own charges and costs pay for their passage and maintenance from this place to the Bay of Chaleur and, when there, find, provide and allow them good, wholesome and sufficient Meat, Drink, Room for themselves for Lodging, Washing, fitting their Station as Master Ship Cartenters, and all other necessarys,

apparrell excepted, during the said Term of two years, as aforesaid, and will also Pay, or cause to be Paid unto the said William King and John Black, each and every of them, the sum of Forty Pounds Halifax Currency, yearly, by Half-yearly payments and by equal proportions, which said Payments to be made in Cash or by Bills of Exchange drawn payable at Québec or London as the said William King or John Black shall think proper or request.

And the said Henry Rimp hoff Covenants, Promises and Agrees with the said William King and John Black that he shall and will pay unto each of them the Sum of Twenty Spanish Dollars for every vessel that they shall construct and erect, by them or under their management, of the Burthen of One Hundred Tons or upwards, upon her being properly finished to a cleat, and that in a workmanlike manner, during the time they shall remain in his, the said Henry Rimp hoff's service.

And Further, the said Henry Rimp hoff Covenants, Promises and Agrees that he shall and will in case of natural sickness or accidents happening to the said William King or John Black, during the foresaid Term of Two Years, furnish, accomodate and provide for them all necessary medicines and attendance during their, or any of their, sickness and moreover shall not deduct or bring a charge against them for such medicines or attendance or the time lost in their Employment during such sickness. Provided always and nevertheless that should the said William King and John Black, any or either of them, by their imprudence bring on any distemper or sickness upon themselves that they shall not only pay for such medicines as may be furnished them but also make good the time lost by him or them in the Service of the said Henry Rimp hoff.

Lastly, the said Henry Rimp hoff Covenants, Promises and Agrees with the said William King and John Black that he will advance and pay unto each of them the Sum of Ten Pounds Halifax which said Sum is hereby declared to be and shall be deducted out of the first, half-years Salary or Wages arising and becoming due unto them.

And for the True Performance of all and singular the Covenants, Promises and Agreements herein particularly mentioned, the said Parties, and each and every of them, Bind and Oblige themselves their Executors and Administrators, firmly by these Presents in the Penal Sum of One Hundred Pounds to be paid by the Party failing to the Party fulfilling and willing to fulfill.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the said Parties have to this MINUTE, and also to Two Copies, Set their Hands the Day, Month and Year first before written.

Witnesses:
James Rule
Simon Fraser

Signed:
Henry Rimphoff
William King
John Black
Chas. Stewart

BAY CHALEUR SHIPBUILDING AND TRADE

A contemporary of Henry Rimphoff in Bay Chaleur and competitor as a Merchant Trader was Matthew Stewart. The career of Matthew Stewart and the story of his family has been traced in previous articles of this GASPE OF YESTERDAY series -(Ref: THE SHOOLBRED SEIGNIORY; ROBERT AND ANNABELLA STEWART AND FAMILY) The Stewart brothers, Matthew, James, Dugald and Charles were shipbuilders and owners. It is in this context that the following 1792 AGREEMENT between Matthew Stewart and Francois Boucher, Mariner, reveals interesting information on the close links between shipbuilding and trade in Bay Chaleur.

BEFORE CHARLES STEWART, NOTARY PUBLIC OF
THE CITY OF QUEBEC, BETWEEN MATHEW STEWART,
FOR SELF AND COMPANY AND FRANCIS BOUCHER.

Before the Public Notaries for the City of Québec and Province of Lower Canada, hereunto subscribing, personally appeared Mr. Mathew Stewart of Tragadagash in the Bay of Chaleurs, Merchant, at present of this City and Mr. Francis Boucher, also of said City, Mariner.

When the parties declared to have made the following agreement between them and requested that the same might be reduced into writing, and is as follows:

That Whereas there is constructing and building at the said Bay of Chaleurs, belonging to him, the said Mathew Stewart, a certain vessel or schooner of about the Burthen of Sixty Tons, which said vessel when properly finished and equipped with masts, bolsprit and rigging, standing and running made of new cordage, with two cables and anchors proper and sufficient for the use of said vessel, together with the following sails, to say, one mainsail and main topsail, one foresail and square sail, jib and flying jib, made of good and sufficient canvas which was brought from England by him, the said Mathew Stewart, for the equipment and fitting out of the said vessel, which said Schooner or Vessel when properly caulked, finished and compleated, the said Mathew Stewart intends sending up to this Port of Québec this Fall before the navigation is shut up, and;

Whereas the said Francis Boucher has proposed and agreed to furnish and deliver to him, the said Mathew Stewart, Eight Hundred Quintals of Meal or Flour, commonly called and known by the name of Farine

entière. Three Hundred and Fifty Quintals of which in good and merchantable condition, in the course of this present month of September to be delivered to him, the said Mathew Stewart, or to his Order, at Québec, and the remainder, being Four Hundred and Fifty Quintals, in like good and merchantable condition, to be delivered at Québec to the said Mathew Stewart, or to his Order, in the course of the month of May, next ensuing, which said Eight Hundred Quintals of meal so to be delivered as aforesaid, the said Mr. Francis Boucher has promised to take and accept of and from the said Mathew Stewart the aforesaid mentioned Schooner or Vessel, equipped and provided for as aforesaid, in full lieu recompense and payment for the said Eight Hundred Quintals of flour, Provided she shall be delivered at Québec this Fall and agreed that should the said Mathew Stewart, by some unforeseen accidents, be prevented to deliver the said Vessel at Québec on or before the Fifteenth day of November next ensuing, then in that case the said Mathew Stewart obliges himself to pay or cause to be paid to the said Francis Boucher, at his own House at Québec, at and after the rate of Eight shillings and Four pence Currency per Quintal, for the said Three Hundred and Fifty Quintals of meal so to be delivered as aforesaid in the course of this present month of September and that upon the said Fifteenth day of November next ensuing, and upon such payment, this Agreement to be null.

Further, the said Mathew Stewart promises and agrees that should the said Vessel arrive at Québec before the said Fifteenth day of November next ensuing, she shall immediately, after unloading her cargo, if any she has, be delivered over with all her sundry appurtenances of whatever kind soever belonging to her, except Provisions.

It is also agreed that in case the Joiner work on the Cabin not have been done before her arrival at this place, the said Francis Boucher is to accept of her without claiming any deduction or abatement whatsoever on that account.

Mathew Stewart further promises that the anchors shall be: One of about Two Hundredweight and the other, Three Hundred, and the cables, One of six inches or more of thickness and the other of seven inches or more and about Seventy or Eighty Fathoms in length.

Lastly, it is coventanted and agreed upon, by and between the said Parties, that should any difficulty arise with regard to the Quality of the Flour or the Condition of the Vessel, in that Case the Parties shall each name a Person who, being so named, shall have Power to name a Third, both Parties obliging themselves to stand to the decision of a majority of such Arbitrators.

To Witness whereof the said Parties have to this Minute, deposited in the Office of Charles Stewart, Public Notary at Québec, affixed their signatures this Eleventh day of September, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Two.

WITNESS

A.Dumas,
Notary Public

(SIGNED)

Mathew Stewart for myself and firm of

Mathew Stewart and Co.

F. Boucher

Chas. Stewart, Notary Public

AN OLD, PROUD TRADITION.

While the "Art, Trade and Mystery" of the shipbuilder in Gaspesia faded with the end of the era of the wind ships it created an old, proud tradition. Sharing in that tradition were the Acadians who sought refuge on Gaspesian shores in their own, home-built schooners. Records show that ships were built in such Acadian settlements as Bonaventure and Carleton prior to Loyalist settlement. The men of the Channel Islands brought with them to Gaspesia a long maritime tradition and shipbuilding skills that could be traced back to the Vikings. The high quality of the many vessels built by the Charles Robin Company, and other Jersey and Guernsey firms engaged in the Gaspesian fishery, was recognized internationally. From the shores of New England came the knowledge and skills that produced the seaworthy whaling schooners in Gaspé Bay and other Gaspesian ports. Ships built in Gaspesia and sailed by hardy Gaspesians were known in the seaports of Atlantic Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, South America and beyond.

An early traveller to and writer on Gaspesia, Abbé Ferland, paid tribute to the seaworthiness of Gaspesian vessels. He commented:

"...Les bâtiments employés pour la pêche de la baleine, dans le Golfe Saint-Laurent, sont de grosses et fortes goëlettes, capable de résister aux tempêtes; car, pour faire du profit a ce métier il faut toujours tenir la mer..."

For like the old Vikings, whose bloodline ran strong in the mariners of early Gaspesia, the maritime life was not only for the "fair weather sailor". Lives depended on the skill and integrity of the shipbuilders. The lines of the poet, Longfellow, which preface this article, were no idle exhortation. The shipbuilders of Gaspesia were equal to the challenge.

Should these closing decades of the 20th century witness a revival of Gaspesian shipbuilding it will mark the renewal of an old and proud tradition.

THE VIKING DRAGON
SHIPS - FIRST EXAMPLE
OF EUROPEAN SHIP
BUILDING ART AND SKILL
THAT MAY HAVE SAILED
GASPESIAN WATERS

