

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

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FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION VISIT

GASPÉ

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The historic visit to Gaspé Basin of the  
Canadian delegates to the Charlottetown  
Conference on August 31st., 1864

KEN ANNETT

## FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION VISIT GASPE

Though publicity and celebrations have made the visit of Jacques Cartier to Gaspé in 1534 known nationally and internationally, Gaspé has, over the years, had other visits of significance that are less well known. One such visit was the arrival in the beautiful harbour of Gaspé Basin of the S.S. QUEEN VICTORIA bearing the Canadian delegates to a meeting of Maritime political leaders at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island for discussion of union.

### THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

The Canadian delegates had embarked on the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA at Québec on the evening of August 29th.,1864. The delegates were:

Hon. John A. Macdonald, M.P.P., Attorney-General, Canada West.

Hon. George E. Cartier, M.P.P., Attorney-General, Canada East.

Hon. D'Arcy McGee, M.P.P., Minister of Agriculture, Canada.

Hon. H.L. Langevin, M.P.P., Solicitor General, Canada East.

Hon. A.T. Galt, M.P.P., Finance Minister, Canada.

Hon. George Brown, M.P.P., President, Executive Council, Canada.

Hon. William McDougall, M.P.P., Provincial Secretary, Canada.

Hon. A. Campbell, M.L.C., Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canada.

A number of accounts of the outward bound voyage exist. From these, the following, from the biography of D'Arcy McGee, will serve to convey an impression of the trip down river:

Eight members of the Coalition Cabinet went to the Charlottetown Conference as the Canadian delegates. The first five were John A. Macdonald, Cartier, Brown, Galt and McGee. With them were Alexander Campbell, Macdonald's former legal partner; Hector Langevin, who had studied law under Cartier and was the younger brother of the Bishop of Rimouski, and William McDougall, who had been brought into the Cabinet by Brown.

Very well documented on what they planned to say, but quite uneasy about their "unofficial" role as self-invited guests, they sailed out of Quebec City on the *Queen Victoria* at sunset on Monday, August 29. Within two hours they were beyond the Isle of Orleans, passing a group of low islands. This was the country of wild fowl, sandpipers, ring plovers, ducks, curlew and teal. Soon the snow geese would be coming, winging their way from the Far North in their rapid, noisy wedges towards these flats.

One of the islands was Grosse Isle, stretching long and low for three dismal miles with its sad air, which brought McGee's own lines back to mind:

Why are the women crying  
Far to the west away?

There in the ship fever plague of 1847 over ten thousand Irish immigrants were buried in unmarked, shallow trenches, row upon dreary row, in a depression of six acres at the western end of the island.

D'Arcy McGee was on deck that evening under a star-lit sky. Someone forward was whistling quietly to himself, and that was the only sound, save the steady splash of water off the bow. Twenty-two years before, when he had sailed past Grosse Isle for the first time, McGee recalled how pleasant it then seemed. His first sea voyage was then almost over, and he was standing with his sister Dorcas in the weather bow near the jib on the old brig *Leo*, listening to his older brother Lawrence talk about Canada. They were moving slowly up the river on the rising tide, and he was watching the low islands slip by on the starboard, and eagerly awaiting his first sight of Quebec Citadel.

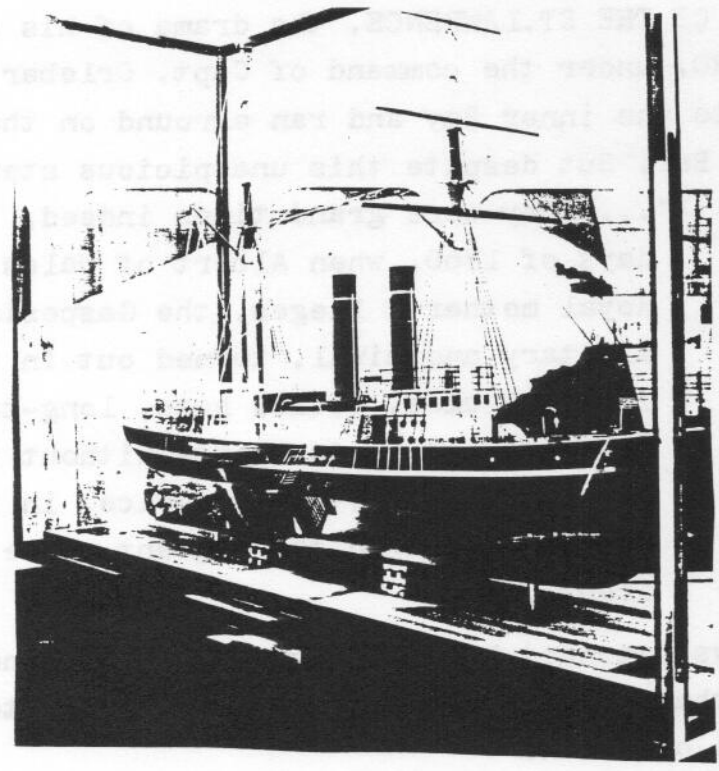
All this was on his mind that evening in late August 1864, as he watched a greyish green glow wavering over the black hills of the receding north shore. The weather signal from Father Point promised it would be clear and sunny for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; and so it was. On Tuesday they appreciated the bold scenery of the St. Lawrence. The names along its south shore were a legend of adventure: Rivière du Loup, Trois Pistoles, L'Islet au Massacre, Le Bic. . . . Early on Wednesday they had coasted around the land's end of Canada, the peninsula which the Micmacs had called *Gaspay*. Rank after rank of steep sea cliffs in ancient formations of dark shale and limestone, showing their upturned edges to the sea and dipping inland, created an illusion that somehow the world had tipped to the north.

Veering south, they gave wide berth to the reefs of Cap des Rosiers. At that time, the fabulous boulder the Ship Head—which sailors called The Old Woman—was still standing in deep water, and on that calm day it loomed out like a phantom ship under full sail. A few years later the Ship Head toppled over into the sea. But then it marked the spot, known to D'Arcy McGee, where the *Carrick* was wrecked in a sudden snow-storm late in May of 1847, and nearly all its 181 Irish immigrants from County Sligo were drowned.

After Cap des Rosiers was skirted, the *Queen Victoria* made her only stop of the voyage, in Gaspé Bay, where dollar fish, star-fish and arrays of strange shells were seen in profusion. Then Percé was sighted, and Bonaventure Island appeared, completely covered, as if by a cloud, with snowy gannets, black cormorants and silvery gulls. Beyond were the vast dark waters of the whale, the seal and the dolphin. "It was Jacques Cartier's undiscovered sea," McGee wrote. "The region was hard, iron-bound and cold."

When dawn broke on Thursday they had just sighted the West Point of Prince Edward Island.

THE S.S. QUEEN VICTORIA



The S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA, as she entered Gaspé Bay on August 31st., 1864, bearing future Fathers of Confederation, was a rather unlikely candidate for historical fame. Built in 1856 by the Robert Napier shipbuilding firm at Govan on the Clyde, Scotland, to the order of the Québec businessman and ship-owner, Francois Baby, the iron steamship, QUEEN VICTORIA, and her sister ship, NAPOLEON III, arrived in Québec in the summer of 1856. A rather diminutive ship, merely 173 feet in length, the QUEEN VICTORIA nevertheless was of technically advanced design and impressive in appearance. However, she was hardly a luxury steamer - her cabins were rather small and cramped, the beds hard and the vibration of her screw all too noticeable.

There had been nothing glamorous about the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA'S initial duties. Under contract to the Government she carried out tug and mail service work, supplied lighthouses and maintained buoys that marked shipping channels of the lower St.Lawrence. In 1859,with her sister ship and three other Baby vessels, she became Government owned.

However, in August 1860 the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA was chosen to

accommodate His Royal Highness, Albert, Prince of Wales and his staff on visit to Canada. It was of that 1860 visit of the Prince of Wales that the Québec historian, James MacPherson LeMoine, recalled in THE CHRONICLES OF THE ST.LAWRENCE, the drama of his arrival in Gaspé when H.M.S. HERO, under the command of Capt. Orlebar, R.N., missed the channel into the inner Bay and ran aground on the seaward side of Sandy Beach Bar. But despite this unaspicious start of the visit Le Moine wrote: "...They were grand times indeed, these gala days of 1860, when Albert of Wales visited his Royal mother's lieges, the Gaspeians. The officials, military and civil, turned out in tremendous force. Plumes, cocked hats, long-tailed coats, short-tailed coats, coats without tails, spurs, swords, helmets, every device, in fact, calculated to lend éclat to the pageant, were brought to the front...."

Gaspé has always extended hospitality to distinguished visitors and it is assumed that the visit of the Canadian delegates in 1864 was a memorable occasion.

As the cruising campaign headquarters of the Canadian delegation the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA would be inscribed indelibly in the pages of Canadian history. For the voyage from Québec downriver to Gaspé and the Gulf special attention had been given to providing the distinguished delegates with all possible comfort. The cook, who knew how to make the best use of his materials, had laid in a large and varied supply of food and drinks. A small library of books had been provided and there were games of chess and backgammon. A broad awning had been stretched on deck under which the delegates could rest in comfort.

A fine model of the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA is to be found, most appropriately in CONFEDERATION CENTRE, Charlottetown, P.E.I., and the ship is the background for the historical painting of Rex Woods in the Confederation Life Series.

GASPE BASIN, AUGUST 31st., 1864

As the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA rounded Cape Gaspé on Wednesday, August 31st., 1864, to run up Gaspé Bay and follow the channel between the

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long spit of Sandy Beach and historic Peninsula Point, some of the Canadian delegation saw, for the first time, the spectacular and commodious beauty of one of Canada's great natural harbours. It is not surprising that the record of the voyage states, simply:

"....the Canadian delegation made time for an excursion ashore before proceeding on to Charlottetown...."

In view of this historic visit it is of interest to recall the Gaspé of 1864 and some of its prominent citizens who may well have met and talked with the visiting Canadian delegates.

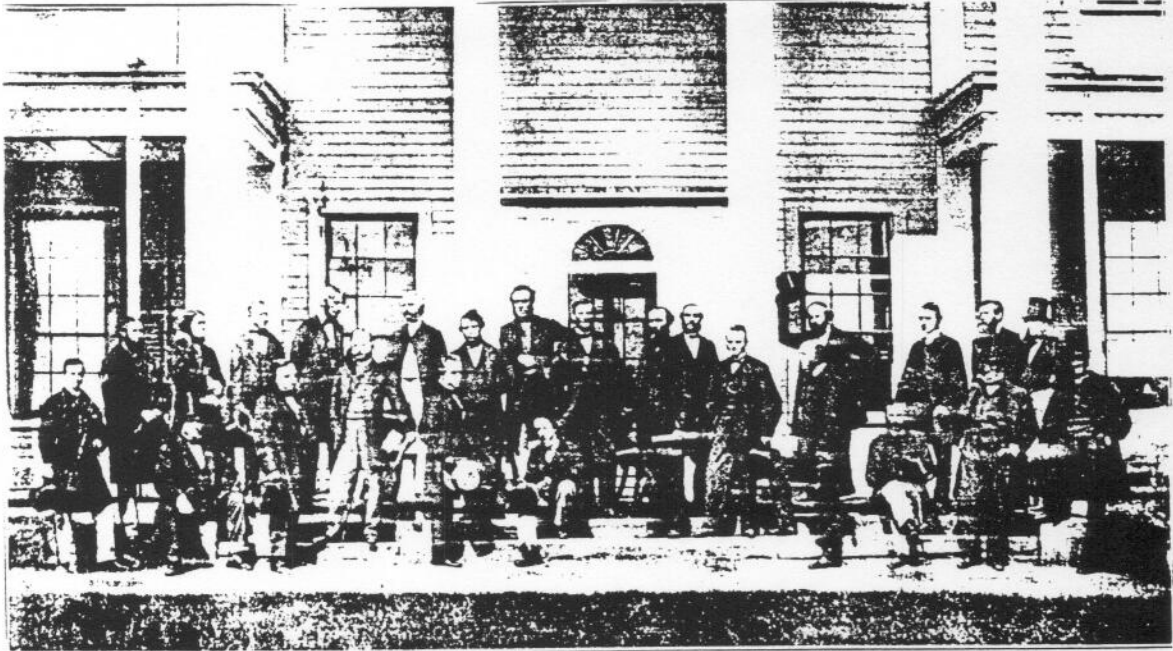
- . Hon. John LeBoutillier was the Member of Parliament for Gaspé and had been since 1854. A prominent Gaspesian, he was a Justice of the Peace, head of the firm of General Merchants that bore his name, and a Gaspé Wharfinger. His home and property of "FORT RAMSAY" overlooked the entrance to the Basin of Gaspé where the S.S.QUEEN VICTORIA moored.
- . Other Justices of the Peace for Gaspé included - Jean C. Belleau, Collector of H.M Customs, Nicholas and George Dumaresq, John Eden, and Antoine Painchaud, Civil Engineer and Surveyor.
- . The Physicians and Surgeons of Gaspé were Doctors Henry G.Moody and William McIntosh.
- . Other General Merchants included Lowndes Brothers, who were also wharfingers; John Slous; Joseph E. Shaw; John Wilson; Jos. Eden; William S.Laws and Angus McKay, Trader.
- . Charles Davis and William Stanley were proprietors of Saw Mills and Charles Davis was a partner with John Davis in the local Flour and Grist Mill.
- . Benjamin Coffin and Alex. Coffin were Boatbuilders. John Baker, Philip LeMarquand and Philip Machon were Carpenters and Builders.
- . The Coffin Hotel operated on the site now occupied by the Auberge des Gouverners of Gaspé and two other hostelries, those of James Carter and Henry Laws welcomed the traveller.
- . Thomas Cabot, John Roy and J.P.Drew were Makers of Boots and Shoes

and Dealers.

- . Two Trades of importance in the Gaspé of 120 years ago were in the capable hands of James Beatty, Blacksmith and John Rose, Stone Cutter.
- . Last, but not least in importance, the education of the children of Gaspé Basin, was the responsibility of the Schoolmaster, John Pope and the Teachers, Mary Pope and Helen Ross.
- . Another glimpse of the Gaspé of 1864 has been provided by Eugene Forsey in his article on his great-grandfather, Joseph Shaw, published by SPEC on November 1, 1983.

It is possible that among old records in the possession of Gaspé families there exist references to the visit of the Canadian delegates to Gaspé. If so, it is to be hoped that they will be brought to public attention as an important part of the Canadian heritage. Did the delegates, for example, entertain Gaspésians on board the S.S. QUEEN VICTORIA as she lay in the lovely, sheltered harbour of the Basin ?

In any event Gaspésians of that far off day had the unique opportunity to meet and visit with men who, at an important turning point of our national history, would influence the origin and the early destiny of Canadian Confederation.



THE DELEGATES AT CHARLOTTETOWN

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| 24 | 14 | 12 | 11 | 9  | 5 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 17 | 19 | 20 | 21 |    |
| 25 |    | 13 |    | 10 | 1 |   | 3 | 8 | 16 |    | 22 | 23 | 26 |
|    | 18 |    |    |    | 2 |   |   |   |    | 18 |    |    |    |
1. Col. The Hon. John Hamilton Gray, M.P.P., Prince Edward Island — Chairman of Convention.
  2. The Hon. John A. Macdonald, M.P.P., *Attorney-General*, Canada West.
  3. The Hon. George E. Cartier, M.P.P., *Attorney-General*, Canada East.
  4. The Hon. Thomas D'Arcy McGee, M.P.P., *Minister of Agriculture*, Canada.
  5. The Hon. Wm. A. Henry, M.P.P., *Attorney-General*, Nova Scotia.
  6. The Hon. Wm. H. Steeves, M.L.C., New Brunswick.
  7. The Hon. John M. Johnson, M.P.P., *Attorney-General*, New Brunswick.
  8. The Hon. Samuel Leonard Tilley, M.P.P., *Provincial Secretary*, New Brunswick.
  9. The Hon Robert Dickey, M. L. C., Nova Scotia.
  10. Lt-Col. The Hon. John Hamilton Gray, M.P.P., New Brunswick.
  11. The Hon. Edward Palmer, M.L.C., *Attorney-General*, Prince Edward Island.
  12. The Hon. Edward Botsford Chandler, M.L.C., New Brunswick.
  13. The Hon. H. I. Langevin, M.P.P., *Solicitor General*, Canada East.
  14. The Hon. Charles Tupper, M.P.P., *Provincial Secretary*, Nova Scotia.
  15. The Hon. A. T. Galt, M.P.P., *Finance Minister*, Canada.
  16. The Hon. Adams G. Archibald, M.P.P., Nova Scotia.
  17. The Hon. Andrew A. McDonald, M.L.C., Prince Edward Island.
  18. The Hon. A. Campbell, M.L.C., *Commissioner of Crown Land*, Canada.
  19. The Hon. Wm. McDougall, M.P.P., *Provincial Secretary*, Canada.
  20. The Hon Wm. H. Pope, M.P.P., *Colonial Secretary*, Prince Edward Island.
  21. The Hon. Jonathan McCully, M.L.C., Nova Scotia.
  22. The Hon. George Coles, M.P.P., Prince Edward Island.
  23. The Hon. George Brown, M.P.P., *President Executive Council*, Canada.
  24. Major Bernard, *Secretary to the Attorney-General*, Canada West.
  25. Mr. Charles Drinkwater, *Private Secretary to the Attorney-General*, Canada West.
  26. William H. Lee, *Clerk Ex. Council*, Canada.