

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

102

"FORT RAMSAY"

ANOTHER GASPÉ BASIN PROPERTY  
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Some highlights of the site  
at the southern entrance to  
Gaspé Basin from the time of  
Jacques Cartier to Confederation.

KEN ANNETT

This would have taken place, according to the entry 2.

On the southern side of the entrance to Gaspé Basin is another point of land that has also been greatly changed through time and the works of man. In the time of Jacques Cartier the mariner entering the beautiful, sheltered Basin past this point would note the sandy beach that fringed its leeward shore, the strategic, plateau-like expanse at the top of the embankment behind the beach and the steep mountain to the rear.

From time immemorial this point, with its sandy beach and nearby brook with a convenient fresh water supply, was evidently a rendezvous of Gaspeian Indians for summer fishing. A cove nearby may have been a native burying-ground. Throughout the French Regime fishermen from France and New France appropriated this point for their summer fishery and fur trading. Glimpses of such activity at the entrance of Gaspé Basin occur in records of the past such as that of the arrival of the naval squadron of Sir Hovenden Walker in the Bay of Gaspé in August, 1711. The Québec historian, Sir James MacPherson LeMoine, wrote of that visit:

"...We next follow the Admiral up Gaspé Bay, within a harbour (Gaspé Basin) where a French ship from Biscay lay unrigged, waiting to load a cargo of fish for Europe. 'I sent in' adds the Admiral, 'and seized her, intending to rig her out'..."

"The French ship captured in the Gaspé harbour was fired, the channel being too intricate to fetch her out. 'I therefore', said the Admiral, 'ordered her to be burned, as well as the houses and stages ashore, and the men to be brought on board prisoners'

"This would have taken place, according to the entry in the Admiral's Journal, on the 20th August. A Biscay fishing craft burnt - the ashes of a dozen of fishermen's huts - a few boats destroyed on the Gaspé shore; such were the only trophies left at this spot by the great British Admiral of the White, Sir Hovenden Walker, Knight Commander-in-Chief of Queen Anne's Armada..."

The Walker expedition of 1711 on sailing from Gaspé enroute to its main objective, the capture of Québec, met with tragic, maritime disaster in the Gulf of St.Lawrence. Québec and New France was spared and Gaspé would continue as a fishing and trading base of the Colony for another forty-seven years. By 1756 an establishment of some importance had grown up on and about the point for in that year the Intendant Bigot noted in a report to the French Colonial Department in Paris:

"...Les prisonniers Anglois qui ont été faits du coste de la rivière St.Jean rapportent tous que la Nouvelle-Angleterre pense sérieusement à venir prendre possession de Gaspé cette année. Il (Monsieur de Vaudreuil) a donné en consequence à un particular qui a des etablissements considérables à Gaspé, et qui a grande envie de les défendre, le commandement sur tous les pêcheurs de ce port..."

The reference of Intendant Bigot to "un particular" was likely to Pierre Révol (c.1714-1759) whose chameleonic career as a salt smuggler, insolvent trader and bankrupt merchant ended with his death at Gaspé. The fascinating story of Révol has been summarized by Michel Paquin in Volume III of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography and additional references to him can be found in the SPEC accounts of The Gaspee Expedition and Other Matters in the

issues of 29/09/78 and 23/02/79. The 1980 monograph of Mario Mimeault entitled PENOUILLE ET GASPE has other, interesting information on the point and period in question.

Despite recommendations of the colonial authorities of New France to provide defences at Gaspé it appears that these remained only good intentions. When the Wolfe expedition from Louisbourg entered Gaspé Bay in 1758 the French inhabitants of the settlement on the point fled up the York and Dartmouth rivers without offering armed resistance. Later, before the British forces left Gaspé Bay the buildings, stores, mill and fishing craft were destroyed. Thus ended the French Regime at Gaspé Basin. The next year Québec would fall to General James Wolfe and in 1760 all of New France would surrender to the British forces.

#### EARLY BRITISH REGIME IN GASPE

The point at the south entrance to Gaspé Basin did not remain deserted long after the fall of New France. Only a couple of years after the capitulation of 1760 the fishing firm of Mackenzie and Payne was operating from its sandy beach and Captain Joseph Dean, R.N., Commander of H.M.S. MERMAID had planted a garden on the slope facing the York River. In a Warrant issued by Governor James Murray in 1766 for the survey of lands in "Gaspey Bay" for Captain Dean, specific instructions were given "to take care to include in the said Lot a garden lately taken in at Gaspey by Captain Deane". In the same year Letters Patent were issued to Captain Dean for a grant of 517 acres of land extending from his garden at the point to Lobster Cove.

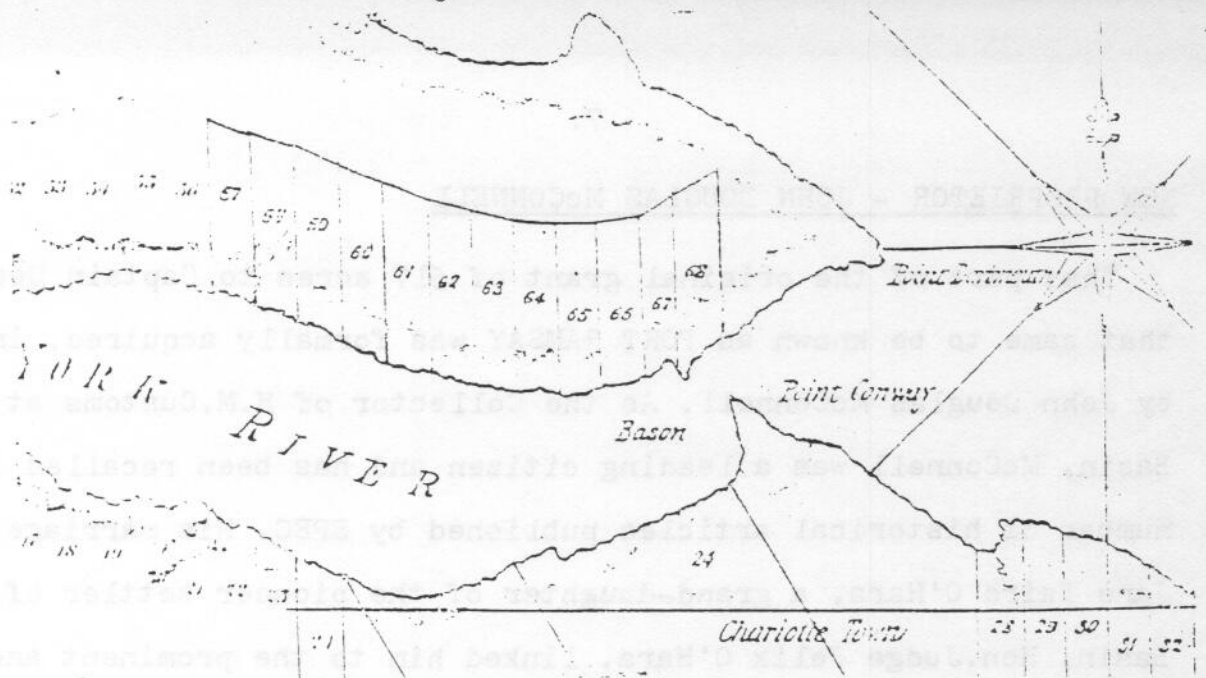
The interest of the new British government of Québec for distant Gaspé is reflected in the 1765 PLAN OF THE BAY AND HARBOUR OF GASPEY prepared by the official surveyor, John Collins. On this plan the



name of CHARLOTTE TOWN was given to the southern slope of Gaspé Basin and the point at the south entrance to the "BASON" named POINT CONWAY. The issue of Letters Patent to Captain Dean, R.N. would have included, as was then customary, a reserve to the Government for fortification of this commanding point at the entrance to the sheltered inner port. However, it appears that the actual placing of a battery of guns on the site was the outcome of the War of the American Revolution when Gaspesia lived in fear of raids by American privateers. The translators and commentators of IMAGES DE LA GASPÉSIE AU DIX-NEUVIEME SIÈCLE, the 1866 illustrated work of Thomas Pye, claim that canon were placed on the heights of the point by the Commander of the warship ST-PIERRE, stationed at Gaspé in 1778-1779 for the protection of the inhabitants. These canon were left in place at the end of the Revolutionary War and were noted by Thomas Pye in his work of 1866 and some may still be found in Gaspé more than a century later.

THE NAME "FORT RAMSAY"

Some thirty years after Captain Dean, R.N. had acquired his land at Gaspé and following the work of the Gaspé Land Claims Commission, the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, visited Gaspé in 1826. George Ramsay, 9th Earl Dalhousie (1770-1838) had a distinguished military career, having risen to command one of Lord Wellington's Divisions of the British Army in the epic struggle against Napoleon in the Spanish Peninsula and France. In 1816 Lord Dalhousie was appointed as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia and in 1819 he had come to Québec as Captain General and Governor-in-Chief for British North America. His visit to Gaspé was an historic occasion and it was in his honour that the property above the point at the south entrance to Gaspé Basin acquired his family name and would long be known as "FORT RAMSAY".



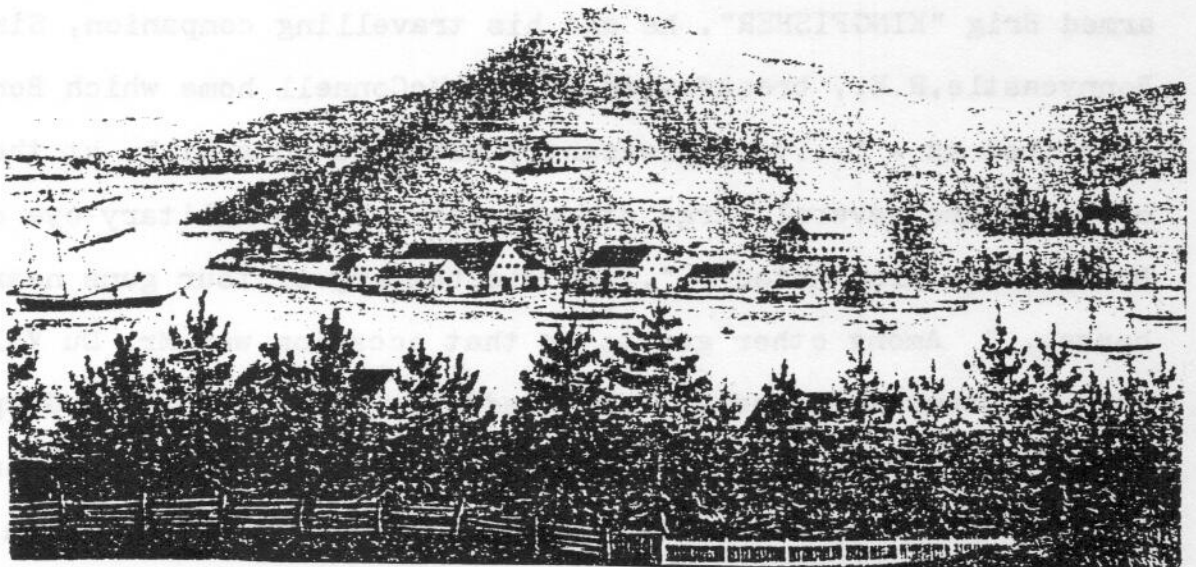
A PLAN

OF THE

Bay and Harbour of Gaspé in the Province of Quebec

*John Collins*

1765



VIEW OF GASPÉ HARBOUR AND THE FORT RAMSAY PROPERTY FROM THE THOMAS PYE BOOK, "GASPÉ SCENERY", PUBLISHED IN 1866.

NEW PROPRIETOR - JOHN DOUGLAS McCONNELL

That part of the original grant of 517 acres to Captain Dean, R.N. that came to be known as FORT RAMSAY was formally acquired, in 1838, by John Douglas McConnell. As the Collector of H.M. Customs at Gaspé Basin, McConnell was a leading citizen and has been recalled in a number of historical articles published by SPEC. His marriage to Jane Baird O'Hara, a grand-daughter of the pioneer settler of Gaspé Basin, Hon. Judge Felix O'Hara, linked him to the prominent and influential families of Gaspé. It is of interest to note that the sister of Mrs. McConnell was the first wife of the Rev. William Arnold and chatelaine of the Gaspé home, SPRING GROVE.

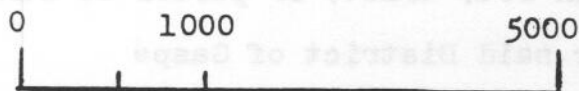
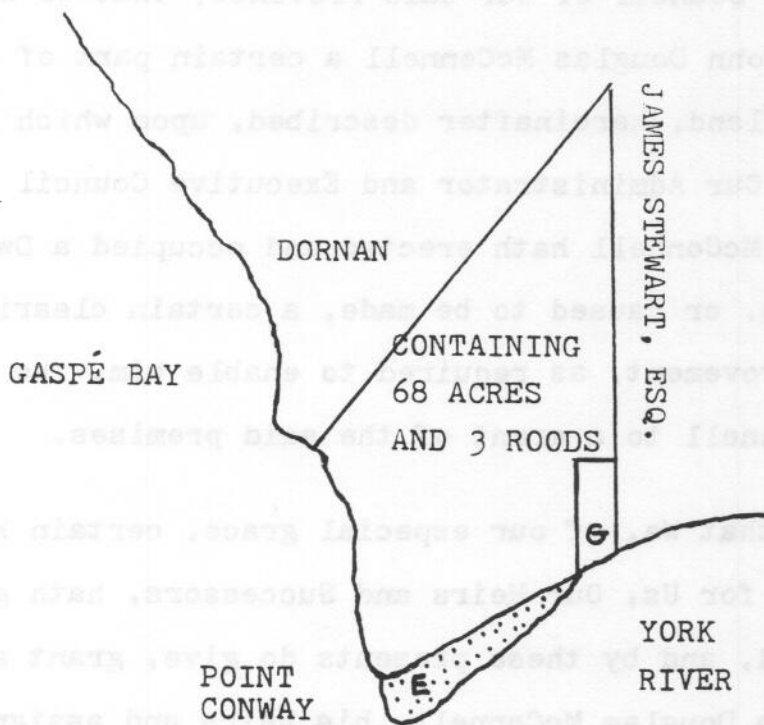
The FORT RAMSAY home of John and Jane McConnell extended much appreciated hospitality to visitors to Gaspé. On the occasion of the visit of the Governor-General, Lord Aylmer, to Gaspé on the armed Brig "KINGFISHER", he and his travelling companion, Sir Richard Bonnycastle, R.E., breakfasted at the McConnell home which Bonnycastle described as - "...very pleasantly situated on a hill, at the base of which are several large storehouses..." The military eye of Bonnycastle also noted - "...an old battery of four guns near the house..." Among other guests on that occasion was Mr. Du Vall. When Lieutenant Frederick Henry Baddeley, R.E., reached Gaspé Basin on his exploration of Gaspesia in 1833 he was likewise a guest at the McConnell home. He noted that his host was, by avocation, a gentleman farmer and he was also much impressed by the fine farm of James Stewart that adjoined the Fort Ramsay property on the west.

The following plan of the McConnell property and the Letters Patent of its grant, hand-lettered on parchment, are preserved at the Québec Archives.

SURVEYOR GENERAL'S OFFICE

QUÉBEC 16 MAY 1838

PLAN  
OF  
JOHN DOUGLAS McCONNELL'S  
PROPERTY AT GASPÉ



SCALE OF FEET

"G" - THE FORMER GARDEN OF  
CAPT. DEAN, R.N.



VICTORIA, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND IRELAND, QUEEN, DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

TO ALL WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, OR WHOM THE SAME MAY CONCERN  
GREETING

Whereas upon the Petition of our loving subject, John Douglas  
McConnell of Gaspé Bay in our District of Gaspé and Province of  
Lower Canada, Esquire, in this behalf it hath been judged reason-  
able and advisable by Our Administrator of Our Government of Our  
Province of Lower Canada, by and with the advice and consent of  
Our Executive Council of Our said Province, that we should grant  
to the said John Douglas McConnell a certain part of a lot, tract  
or parcel of land, hereinafter described, upon which it hath been  
certified to Our Administrator and Executive Council that the said  
John Douglas McConnell hath erected and occupied a Dwelling House,  
and hath made, or caused to be made, a certain clearing, cultivat-  
ion, and improvement, as required to enable him, the said John  
Douglas McConnell to a grant of the said premises.

NOW KNOW YE that We, of our especial grace, certain knowledge, and  
mere motion, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, hath given, granted  
and confirmed, and by these presents do give, grant and confirm to  
the said John Douglas McConnell, his heirs and assigns, for ever,  
part of a certain lot, tract, or parcel of land situated in the said  
Gaspé Bay in Our said District of Gaspé

Being part of a Crown Reserve at Gaspé Bay, forming a Triangular  
tract of sixty acres, to which is joined a small Trapezium, being  
a vacant space of eight acres, three roods, in the rear of Captain  
Dean's Garden, the which Tract thus hereby granted was part of the  
grant of five hundred and seventeen acres made to Captain Joseph  
Dean, dated the twenty-third day of August, one thousand seven  
hundred and sixty six.

The said Tract of Land hereby granted is bounded on the north by Gaspé Bay, northwestward by the Beach of York River or Reserve marked E on the plan and in part by the rear of the Garden above mentioned, on the southwest also partly by the said Garden and partly by the Land of James Stuart (sic) Esquire, beginning at a Poplar Tree standing on the Bank of York River one hundred and eighty two feet from the mouth of a small Brook emptying itself into the said River, and running from thence south thirty degrees east along the east side of a Garden formerly Captain Joseph Dean's, R.N., now occupied by James Mills, four hundred and ninety feet or to the back line of said Garden, thence along the said Back or Rear Line of the said Garden south sixty degrees west about two hundred feet or to the north east bounds of the property of James Stuart, Esquire, thence along the said north east bounds south thirty degrees east about two thousand fifty feet, thence about two thousand five hundred feet to a Stone Boundary on the Bank at a small Cove usually called Burying Ground Cove which divides it from Land occupied by Mr. Dornan, and thence westward along the Bank, passing in the rear of the Beach or Point reserved for the use of Messrs McKenzie Payne and Co. and now occupied by Messrs Janvrins and others, to the first station or point of departure, containing together, with the Trapezium, about sixty eight acres three roods Statute measure.

To have and to hold the said part of a lot, tract or parcel of land and premises hereinbefore given, granted and confirmed by Us, Our Heirs and Successors, unto and to the use of our said Grantee, his Heirs and Assigns forever, in free and common soccage, by fealty only, in lieu of all other and all manner of rents, services, fines, rights, dues, duties, claims and demands whatsoever, in like manner as lands are holden in that part of Great Britain called England.

PROVIDED ALWAYS, and these Our Letters are upon the express condition, that if our said Grantee, his Heirs or Assigns, shall not, within one year next after the date of these Our Letters, plant and effectually cultivate at least Two acres of the land hereby granted and shall not also within seven years, to be computed as last aforesaid, plant and effectually cultivate at least seven acres of the land hereby granted, Then, and in either or both of these cases, this Our present grant, and everything herein contained, shall become and be absolutely void.....

[ There followed the standard GENERAL RESERVATIONS for the Crown regarding roads, forts for military defence, minerals, etc ]

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent and the Great Seal of Our said Province of Lower Canada to be hereunto affixed.

WITNESS, Our Trusty and Well Beloved Lieutenant General Sir John Colborne, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honorable Military Order of the Bath and of the Royal Hannoverian Order, Commander-in-Chief of Our Forces in the province of Lower Canada and of Upper Canada and Administrator of Our said province of Lower Canada etc. etc.

At Our Castle of Saint Lewis in Our City of Quebec in Our said province of Lower Canada the fifteenth day of May in the Year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty eight and in the First Year of Our Reign.

REGISTERED AT QUEBEC 16 MAY, 1838



NEW OWNERSHIP

The FORT RAMSAY property was acquired, in 1846, by the Hon. John LeBoutillier, the Member of Parliament for Gaspé during most of the period from his first election in 1833 until Confederation in 1867. He and his wife, Elizabeth Robin, daughter of Philip Robin of the influential Charles Robin Company, continued the tradition of FORT RAMSAY as one of Gaspé's widely known homes.

A native of the Island of Jersey, John LeBoutillier had come to Gaspesia as a youth of 15 years in the employ of the Robin Co. By 1840 he had so mastered the Gaspesian fishery that he established his own firm in competition with the C.R.C. LeBoutillier vessels linked Gaspesia with Jersey, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Brazil and the West Indies in the export-import trade of the Gaspé fishery. FORT RAMSAY and the wharves and warehouses of the adjoining water-front at the entrance to Gaspé Basin was the center of a commerce and trade that made John LeBoutillier one of Gaspesia's most widely known and respected men of the time.

In 1865 fire destroyed the FORT RAMSAY home dating from the era of John Douglas McConnell. John LeBoutillier then built a new home on the site - the residence illustrated by the Gaspesian author, Thomas Pye, in his book of 1866.

SUBSEQUENCE

The subsequent story of the FORT RAMSAY property must await another article in this GASPE OF YESTERDAY series. That account would recall the association of the property with those involved with the search for petroleum in Gaspé, the arrival of the railway and its terminal at the Gaspé Harbour point, the pulp-wood industry established on the adjoining water-front and the establishment on the site of Gaspé's



first Hotel-Dieu Hospital - all those developments of the passing years leading to the present use of the site.

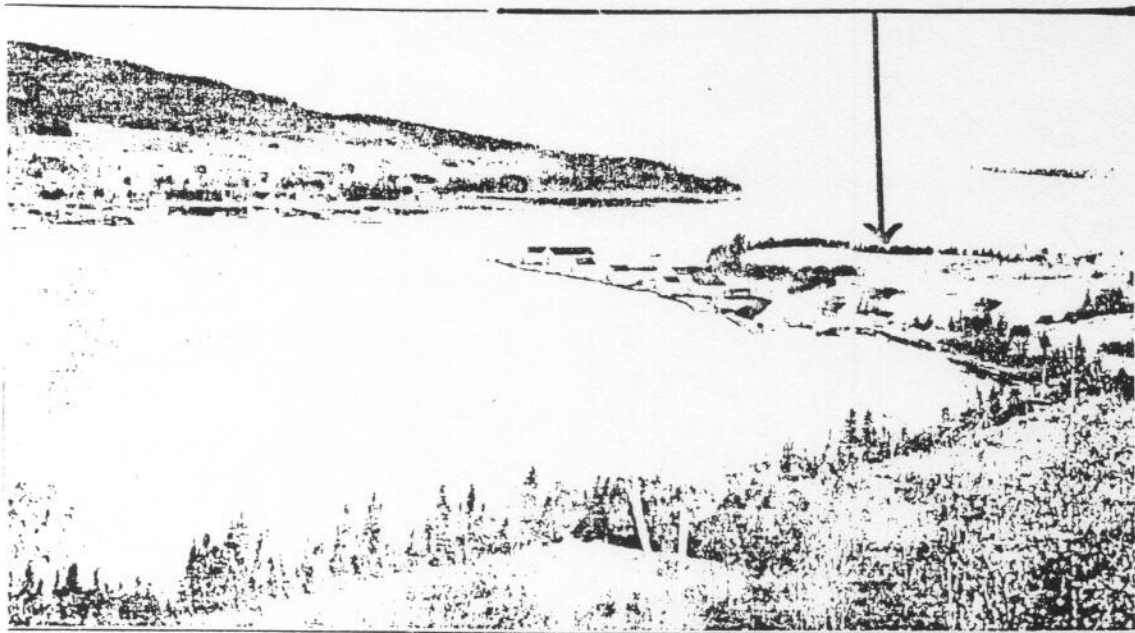
In common with the case of the SPRING GROVE property, the sweep of time has greatly changed the FORT RAMSAY property. However, its past and the recall of those who once lived there, is an integral and important part of the history and heritage of Gaspé.

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REFERENCE

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THE FORT RAMSAY PROPERTY



GASPÉ BASIN.

IN ADDITION

The deliberate use of the word "another" in the title above will serve to recall that the early home and property of the Rev. William Arnold, SPRING GROVE, at Gaspé Basin, has been described in the article of the same name published by SPEC on July 6, 1982 and in Doris and David McDougall's article, "MY DEAR SARAH", published August 10, 1982. The SPRING GROVE property included the point on the north side of the entrance to Gaspé Basin that has been known at various times as Point Dartmouth, Point O'Hara, Arnold's Bluff and Point Jacques Cartier. Fifty years ago, when Rev. C.E.Roy and Lucien Brault published HISTORICAL GASPE, this was the Jopling property. In the days of World War II the Battery Park Hotel was located on part of the property near the Bluff. Today, the Musée régional de Gaspé occupies the site of that former hotel and the sweep of time has changed, almost beyond recognition, the environs of SPRING GROVE.