

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

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DOWN ON THE POINT

Recalling the past of the Point
at L'Anse-aux Cousins on the
North-West Arm of Gaspé Bay.

Ken Annett

DOWN ON THE POINT

FOREWORD

The shoreline of the inner Bay of Gaspé, extending inward from the great sand-bar of Sandy Beach to the estuaries of the Dartmouth and York rivers at the head of the North-West and South-West Arms, respectively, is one of much variety. The outflow of the rivers, interacting with the rhythmical ebb and flow of the tidal waters of the Bay, has, over eons of time, created points of sand at locations other than those of Sandy Beach Bar and adjoining Peninsula Point. One of the more extensive of such points is found on the southern shore of the North-West Arm on the seaward side of the Cove known as L'Anse-aux-Cousins. This point, now practically deserted and returning rapidly to its natural state, was, within living memory the site of a major lumber industry and the work-place of hundreds of the residents of Gaspé Bay communities. In this article, GASPE OF YESTERDAY proposes to recall life DOWN ON THE POINT.

THE POINT

The appended SKETCH MAP OF GASPE BAY indicates the location of the L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point on the south shore of the North-West Arm. At the head of the Arm a bridge linking the communities of Point Navarre and Fontenelle crosses the mouth of the Dartmouth River. The leeward side of the Point, washed by the waters of the L'Anse-aux-Cousins Cove, is sheltered from the easterly storms that lash the waters of Gaspé Bay from time to time.

From the landward base of the low-lying Point the terrain rises so sharply as to make impracticable the building of direct access roads from the highway. From near water level at Saw Mill Brook at L'Anse-aux-Cousins Cove, the highway rises steadily to the height of land dividing the Cove from Gaspé Basin. In the era of lumber activity on the Point two, distinct roads were built to link the Point with the highway. The first of these, known locally as the SLAB ROAD, ran along the base of the narrow beach that rimmed the Cove, past the mouth of SAW MILL BROOK, to join the highway at the base of CANON HILL, near the community school. Later, a second road was pushed diagonally upwards along the face of the steep terrain to the homesite of SHEPARDVILLE and thence to a meeting with the highway

where it sloped downwards from the height of land to Gaspé Basin. The SLAB ROAD drew its name from its base of countless slabs of the logs sawed in the lumber mills. A feature of that road was the long, wooden flume that was built along its landward base to carry a supply of fresh water to the mills from a dam on SAW MILL BROOK. Water carried by the flume was stored in a large water-tank or reservoir at the point where the SLAB ROAD left the Point.

Across the waters of the North-West Arm from the Point and behind the line of settlement that extended from Peninsula, through Rosebridge to Fontenelle, rose the forested mountains separating the Bay of Gaspé from the St. Lawrence. For many of the residents of these communities who found employment at the Point the easiest access for most of the year was by water. The waters of the Bay served also for the towing of logs from the collection booms near the Dartmouth Bridge to the mill site on the Point. Again, from the deep water wharf on the leeward side of the Point lumber was loaded directly on large, ocean-going sailing ships and steamships for delivery to the markets of the world.

THE POINT'S EARLIER DAYS

Long before the arrival of Europeans in Gaspé Bay the Point served as a convenient fishing station for the native Indian people. The waters of Gaspé Bay and the Dartmouth River abounded in fish, including the prized Atlantic salmon. The sandy beaches of the Point were ideal for the beaching of Indian canoes, for the drying and smoking of fish, and for summer camps that had the natural air-conditioning from the sea breezes that swept daily over the low plain.

History does not record when the Indian people of Gaspé Bay first had contact with European fishermen and whalers but it was probably before the documented arrival of Jacques Cartier at Gaspé in 1534. It is known that during the French Regime fisherman used the Point as a fishing station and stored their fishing craft there during the winter months. Capt. Bell, A.D.C. to General James Wolfe, noted in his Journal of the GASPEE EXPEDITION, that some 50 French fishing "shaloupes" were found at L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point, adding, "...they always lay them up there in winter"

THE POINT'S EARLIER DAYS (CTD)

In her interesting article, "ANSE-AUX-COUSINS", published in an early issue of SPEC, Elaine Jones of Gaspé recalled the settlement of Abraham Coffin, a native of Nantucket, on 600 acres of land at L'Anse-aux-Cousins in 1783. A descendant of the noted Coffin family of Nantucket, noted seamen and whalers, Abraham is credited with the introduction of whaling to other pioneer Gaspé settlers. In addition to Peninsula Point, the Point at L'Anse-aux-Cousins was a convenient location for the production of whale-oil. In his account of a visit to Gaspé in the summer of 1821, Dr. Von Iffland of Québec wrote:

"...Behind the Basin, on the south side of the Bay, is a little cove called L'Anse aux Cousins, inhabited by two or three families that live on the produce of a few small farms. Messrs Boyle, the best known and most successful whalers of the whole Gaspé district, have furnaces there with enormous cauldrons in which they melt down whale blubber, after it is cut up into pieces. I judged the construction to be crude, though I was prevented from making a close examination because of the stench and pollution..."

Some years later Lieut-Col. Sir Richard Bonnycastle, R.E., visited Gaspé and noted in his subsequent book, THE CANADAS IN 1841 - VOL.II :

"...On the north-west arm we found that there was another branch of the Micmac nation, who existed by salmon-fishing... here we saw a seal and picked up two specimens of cornula on the shore of a spit ... a natural, coarse grass is fast covering this useful sand-bank...there were some poor settlers on that part adjoining the main land; and here there is a whale fishery establishment and salmon weirs... a small house was visited in which two families with fourteen children lived, the fathers being engaged in whaling on the coast of Labrador..."

LUMBER MILLS

The milling of lumber in the Gaspé Bay region had its origins in the years of the French Regime. Capt. Bell of the GASPEE EXPEDITION, writing of the destruction of one such French saw-mill by the forces of General Wolfe, noted:

"...on the 7th (of September, 1758) at day break we went up the farther arm, having heard some of the people were there, 'tis ten mile up to the Morass, the Channel the same in regard to its difficulty as to the other, we took 8 men here and sent them down in the Barge (1 an Indian) then went to a saw mill just bye where we found a vast number of plank, we immediately fell to work and sett fire to the Moulin, plank and 3 houses which blazed very handsomely to the no small grief of the poor people..."

As for L'Anse-aux-Cousins, Elaine Jones has noted that there was a small lumber mill near the mouth of the brook by the old "habitation" of the pioneer settler, Abraham Coffin. Such mills met local needs for construction and boat-building.

The Gaspé born historian and author, Leigh Boyle Coffin, in his fascinating book, THE DANCING WATERS, recalled the early lumber mills of L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point and on Point L'Amour, a mile or so to the West. James T. Calhoun of Chilliwack, B.C., in his letter of 1983, wrote of these mills:

"...My father was John C. Calhoun of Gaspé, formerly of Albert, N.B....my father, owning one of the mills outright, and it was called by him the Albert Lumber Company. The second mill (on L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point) was one owned jointly by my father and his brother, Thomas B. Calhoun, and that was known as the Calhoun Lumber Company. I understand that, for those times, it was quite a large operation. Both mills, to my knowledge, shipped almost their entire output of lumber products to Great Britain; local sales amounting to only the needs of the populace of the Village of Gaspé, whose population was then small. A fire destroyed my father's mill and there were left certain family complications..."

As the Mayor of Gaspé, John C. Calhoun was host, in 1913, to the Governor-General of Canada, the Duke of Connaught and his niece, Princess Patricia, on their visit to Gaspé. His son, James Calhoun recalls :

"...Seemingly, father did rather well at that job, because the Duke originally intended staying but a few hours - he ended up staying, as I understand, for some two or three days, and father arranged a fishing trip for the Duke and his Niece, some of the other Gaspé businessmen participating...Father was not a sportsman, but bought himself one of the large, two-handed fly rods so popular in that day. During the tour of fishing it became evident that the Princess was not fishing; father enquired why she was not, and she replied that, not expecting to go fishing, she did not bring any of her personal tackle and equipment with her. To which father replied, 'Dear Lady - please use mine and be welcome; I don't know how to fish, I bought it only for this outing - I would be glad to have you use it'. The Princess very graciously and happily accepted. It soon became evident this young lady had been superbly trained in the use of the fly rod.. she caught her first Atlantic salmon on father's rod, playing the fish, which was a large one, with all the expertise possible. Both she and the Duke just beamed and, in due course, father and mother were invited, along with other guests, to the Duke's yacht for dinner..."

The John C. Calhoun family left Gaspé in the Spring of 1914, moving first to Moncton, N.B., the home town of Mrs. Calhoun, the former Mary Allena Trites and thence to Chilliwack, B.C. from where James T. Calhoun wrote to GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY in 1983.

ENTER - SHEPARD AND MORSE

The Calhoun Lumber Co. mill was also destroyed by fire in 1912 and the site of L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point together with the logging limits or rights in the Dartmouth River valley became the property of the Shepard and Morse Lumber Co. of Boston, Mass., operated by J.H. Shepard. The new owner engaged Harris T. Calhoun and his brother, E. Orlay Calhoun as manager and assistant manager, respectively, to rebuild the mill and to operate the lumber business. The spacious homes built for and occupied by Harris and Orlay Calhoun, still stand, in 1984, on the slope above the Point with its sweeping view of the North-West Arm of Gaspé Bay.

From his home in Outremont, Québec, Mr. Tom Calhoun has, in a letter to GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY, shared his recollections of the Company his father managed.

"The Shepard and Morse Co. had a large operation, including the bush, booms and mills, thus requiring a great many men and a lot of supervision.

The bush and woodlands end of it was managed by Mr. George Buckley. It consisted of a varying number of camps, some of which were run by Messrs. Jos. Miller of York, Dolan Fournier of Fontenelle, Mr. André Chrétien and Mr. Johnson. They started cutting in early Fall, followed by the haul off to the river banks of the Dartmouth River and the log drive on Spring break-up. The drive took the logs to the storage boom near the mouth of the river.

The Anse-aux-Cousins site consisted of the band-saw mill, a wharf, planing and box mills and a shingle mill. There was also a general store and office building, a cook-house, a bunk-house, a machine shop, a blacksmith shop, a stable, shingle and lath storage building, along with several warehouses. In later years, a farm was added to supply meat and vegetables.

The logs were moved from storage to mill booms by a side-wheeler tug, skippered by Mr. Walter Suddard of L'Anse-aux-Cousins"

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" All spruce, fir and pine logs went through the sawmill and the cedar logs to the shingle mill. The sawmill produced rough lumber of various sizes and laths. The lumber was sorted according to size and quality and hauled to the lumber yard to dry out; the laths to a storage warehouse. A very important person in the sawmill was the sawyer, a Mr. Willis.

The sawmill ran from Spring to Fall and often on double shifts. These started at 7:00 till noon or midnight and then from 1:00 till 6:00

The planing mill ran all year round on the same shifts. It turned out lumber in many shapes and sizes. Practically all of the finished lumber was shipped by rail. This meant the use of scows in summer and horse teams in winter, using a winter road over the ice to Gaspé Harbour. The scows were towed by a gas powered launch skippered by a Mr. Larsen. The shingle mill did not usually run all summer as cedar was becoming scarce.

Mr. Charles Coffin of Anse-aux-Cousins looked after the sorting, measuring and piling of lumber in the yard as well as the measuring and shipping of it, whether it be by water or by rail. Practically all of the rough lumber was shipped by schooner, square rigger and by steamer. The sailing ships were of all sizes, two, three, four and even five masted, and went to ports all over the world.

The mill-wright was Mr. Jack Coffin of Anse-aux-Cousins. The store manager was Mr. George Simpson of Rosebridge and there was a clerk named Leo Kenny. The office staff consisted of Messrs. Herb Goodwin, Howard Kierstead and Fred Dolbel, accountants. Ms. Maria Coffin and Minnie Shiverton were stenographers.

The mill foremen changed frequently but among them were Fred Guignon and Mr. Simpson of Rosebridge and Antoine Fournier of Fontenelle.

Among the lumber scalers were Laurie Coffin of Anse-aux-Cousins, Smith Beard of Douglastown and Sandy Robinson. The stable chargehands included at various times Messrs. Ab. LeLacheur, Ed. Annett and Walter Collas.

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"Among the engineers at the mills were Messrs. Henry Annett, Ben Mullin of Peninsula and Cal Minchinton.

The horses were a very important factor in all this and the men who drove them were the key to it all. They included Wyndham Bourgaise, Jack LeLacheur and Tom Mullin. While the sawmill operated they hauled lumber to the yard and, in winter, to the railway. They also took part in the log haul-off in the bush.

The machine shop was in charge of Mr. Harry Feltmate who looked after mechanical repairs and maintenance. The blacksmith was a Mr. Steeves.

The farm was in the capable hands of Mr. Billy McKillop.

The people employed in the mills and bush came from all over the coast.

This information is from memory and goes back sixty to seventy years ago.

Sincerely,

Tom Calhoun "

IMPACT OF THE COMPANY

The impact of the extensive operations of the Shepard and Morse Lumber Company on the economy of Gaspé Bay communities was most substantial and significant. In its years of prosperity and full operation the Company processed millions of feet of lumber and lumber products, thus providing employment for up to four hundred men of the Gaspé District. The shipment of lumber by sea and rail and the import of supplies needed to sustain operations gave much additional employment in the field of transportation. For a generation, the Company pay-roll was not only the support of many Gaspé families but was a significant factor in the support of local merchants, professional people, schools, churches and other community interests.

The "golden era" of the lumber operation on L'Anse-aux-Cousins Point was the decade from 1914 onwards. In the mid 1920's fire destroyed two of the mills and as the Canadian economy wound down in the late 1920's towards the Great Depression, the operations

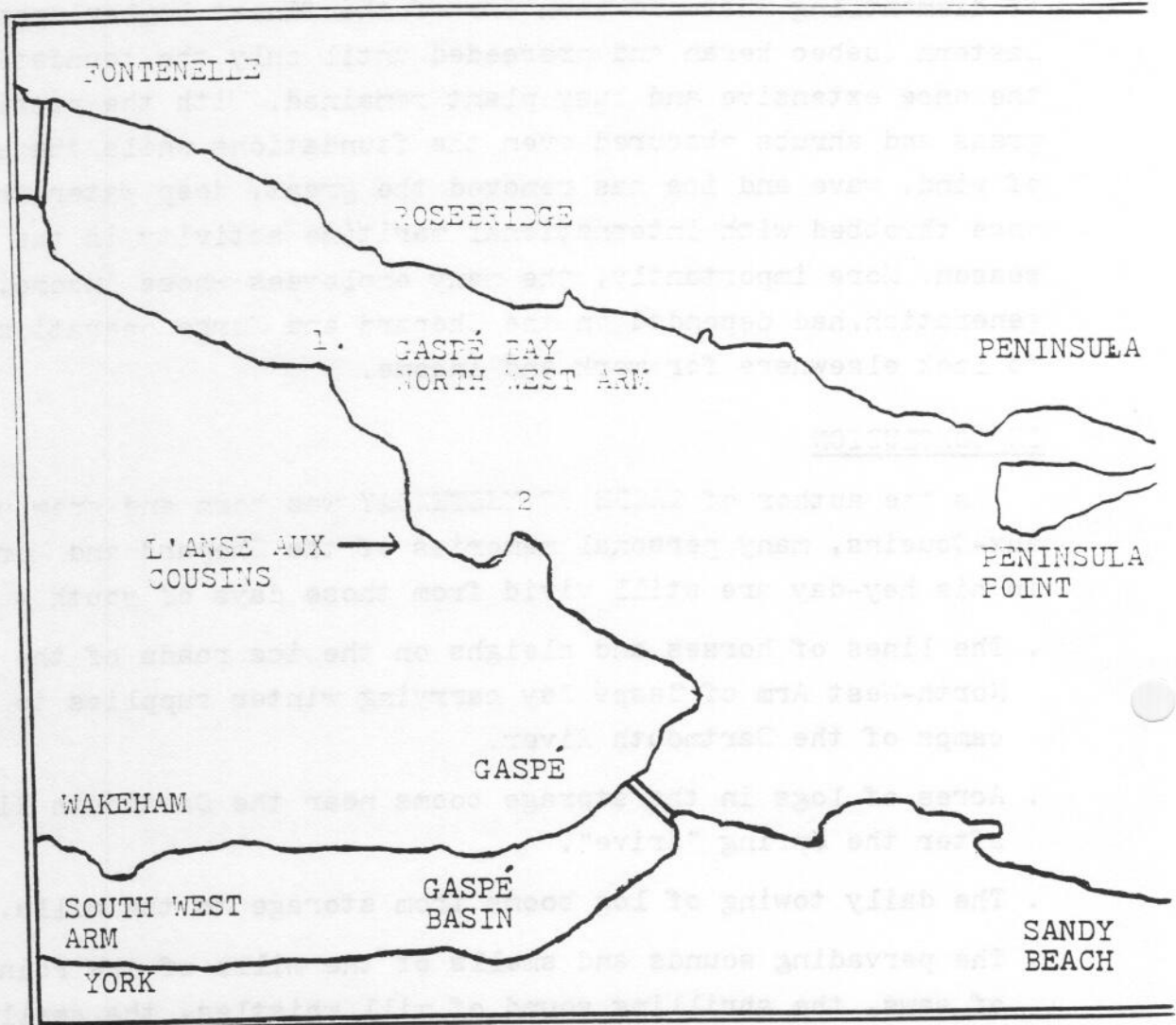
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of the Company declined and came to an end in 1929-30. The sad process of dismantling what had been one of the finest lumber operation in Eastern Québec began and proceeded until only the foundations of the once extensive and busy plant remained. With the passing years grass and shrubs obscured even the foundations while the erosion of wind, wave and ice has removed the great, deep water wharf that once throbbbed with international maritime activity in the shipping season. More importantly, the many employees whose income, for a generation, had depended on the Shepard and Morse operations, had to look elsewhere for work and income.

IN CONCLUSION

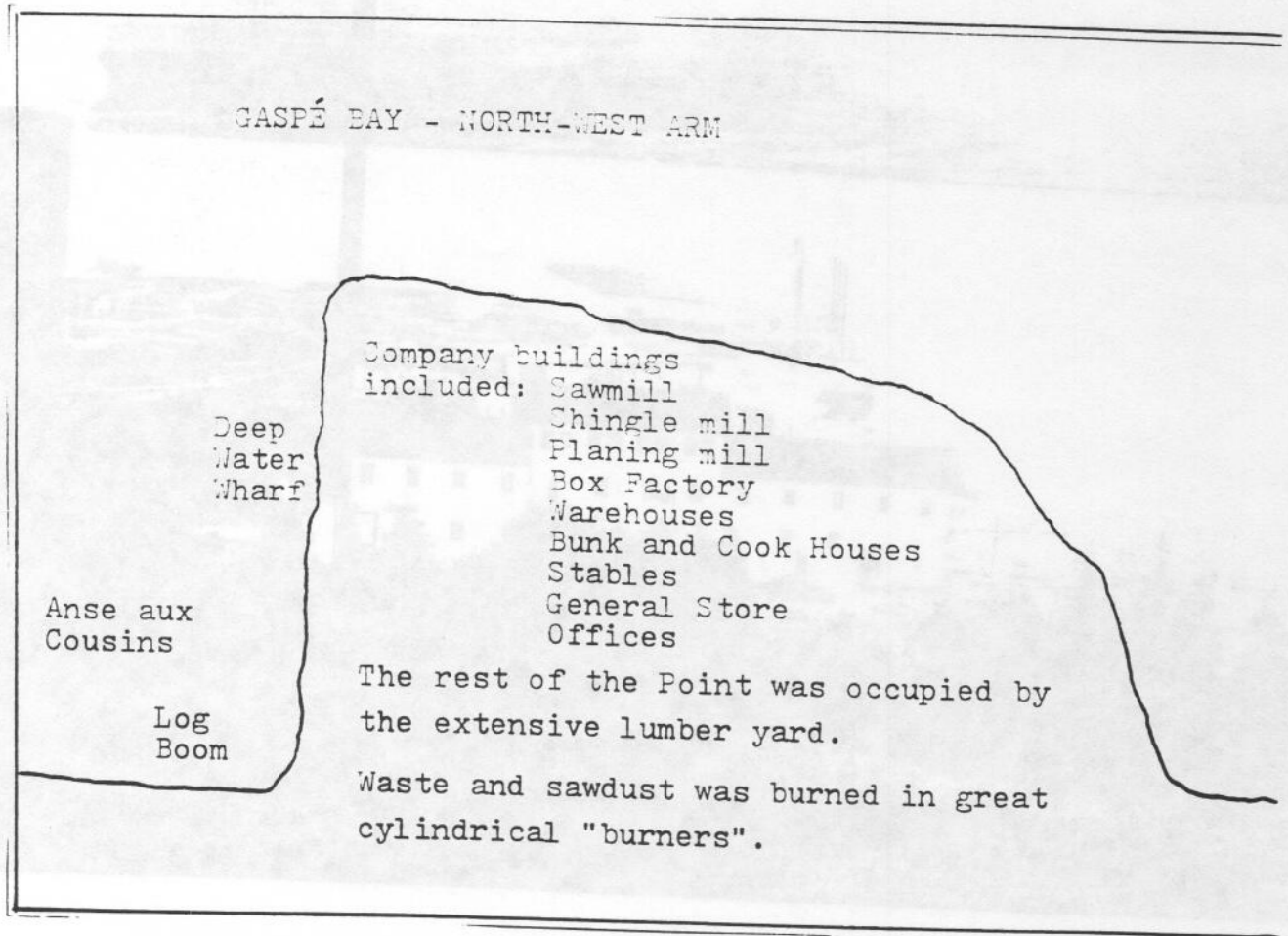
As the author of GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY was born and grew up at L'Anse-aux-Cousins, many personal memories of the Shepard and Morse Lumber Co. in his hey-day are still vivid from those days of youth -

- . The lines of horses and sleighs on the ice roads of the frozen North-West Arm of Gaspé Bay carrying winter supplies to the lumber camps of the Dartmouth River.
- . Acres of logs in the storage booms near the Dartmouth River bridge after the Spring "drive".
- . The daily towing of log booms from storage to the mills.
- . The pervading sounds and smells of the mills of the Point - the whine of saws, the shrilling sound of mill whistles, the smells of fresh-sawn lumber and of the smoke of burning saw-dust and waste.
- . The arrival and departure of sailing ships and steamers, in season, and the loads of lumber they carried to world markets.
- . The Company's General Store, open not only to employees but to all of the families of the community.
- . The good relations that existed between the Company and the Community and between the Company and its employees.

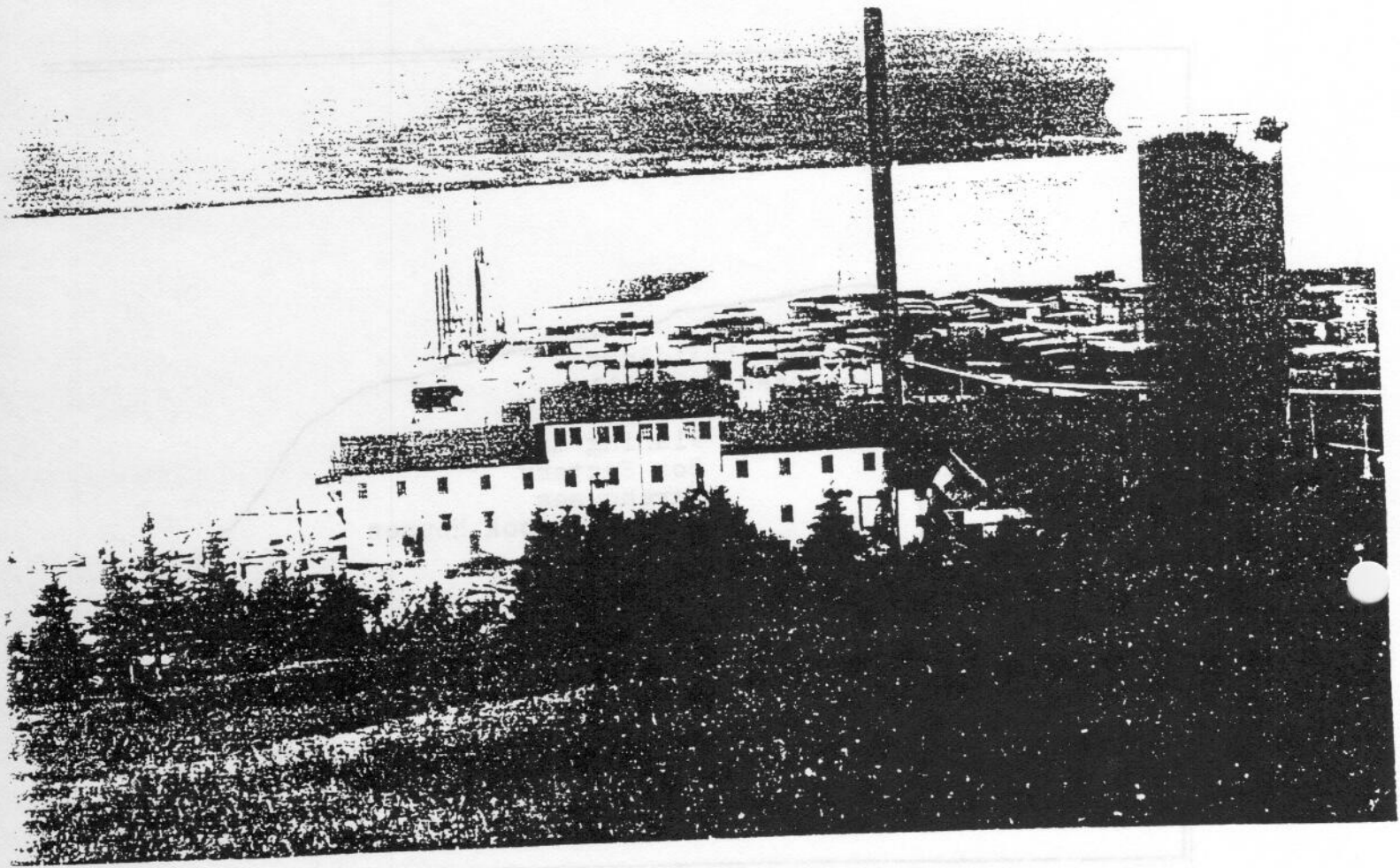


SKETCH MAP OF GASPE BAY

1. POINT L'AMOUR - SITE OF THE ALBERT LUMBER CO. MILL.
2. L'ANSE-AUX-COUSINS POINT - SITE OF THE CALHOUN LUMBER CO. MILL AND, LATER, OF THE SHEPARD AND MORSE LUMBER CO. MILLS.



THE L'ANSE-AUX-COUSINS POINT BASE OF THE SHEPARD AND MORSE LUMBER COMPANY - DEVELOPED FROM 1913 TO 1923.



THE SHEPARD AND MORSE LUMBER CO.

L'ANSE-AUX COUSINS

GASPE