

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

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GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE

PART I

Some highlights of the voyage
of Abbé J.B.A. Ferland to the
Gaspé Mission on the schooner
SARA in the year 1836.

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GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE-PART IFOREWORD

Impressions of Gaspesia, as recorded by visitors to its shores, have been recalled in several of the one hundred and twenty issues of GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY completed previously. The tradition of the travelogue is an ancient one, as Greek literature testifies, and as we are reminded by the opening lines of Shelly's OZYMANDIAS -

"I met a traveler from an antique land,

Who said:..."

It is proposed to present here some of the impressions recorded by the Abbé J.B.A. Ferland on his visit, by sea, to Gaspesia in 1836 with Bishop Turgeon. Though his account was not published until some twenty-five years later, his impressions of Gaspesia remained vivid and are an interesting travelogue of a period one hundred and fifty years ago.

THE "SARA" DEPARTS

The Bishop's party embarked at the Port of Québec June 15th., 1836 on the schooner SARA, chartered for the voyage to Gaspesia. Built at St.Gregoire and launched earlier in that Spring of 1836, the SARA was new, well-equipped and adequately manned by her Captain, his Mate, two seamen and a cook. Abbé Ferland provided an excellent description of this schooner:

- . Her fine lines that enabled her to attain a speed of up to 14 knots in a fresh breeze.
- . Her great main sail with 180 square yards of canvas.
- . Her three strong anchors capable of holding her in bad weather.
- . Her small cannon that was used to signal and salute.
- . The Captain's cabin and adjacent small salon, given over for this voyage to the Bishop, his secretary and Abbé Ferland.
- . The crew's quarters forward, crowded on this occasion by the Captain, Mate, Seamen, Cook and two of the Bishop's servants.
- . The hold with its many boxes, barrels, etc. and with 300 "minots" of salt stored under the floor.
- . The sturdy ship's boat, piles of wood for the galley fire and two cages of hens on deck.

As the SARA's lines were cast off and she moved out into the Basin of the Port of Québec, Abbé Ferland's attention was drawn to an Indian family in a bark canoe that crossed her path. The canoe held the father, mother, children, dogs, household utensils, skins and tenting, all "pêle-mêle", so that the gunwales of the frail craft were barely above the water. "Yet", marvelled the Abbé, "it seemed that they felt themselves to be profoundly secure"

OUTWARD BOUND

By early morning of June 16th the SARA was off Crane Island in fine weather with some thirty other sailing ships in view. Off River Ouelle porpoises began to play about the schooner and seals by the hundreds were to be seen. Schools of capelin were encountered off Ile aux Basques. Abbé Ferland noted that ashore, between Trois-Pistoles and Bic, there was only one house where the traveller by road might lodge, the home of the Widow Petit. Faced with a strong headwind, the SARA, anchored in the lee of Bic Island. There, the Abbé was reminded of the plans of one of the Governors of New France to develop Bic as the great terminal seaport for the France-Québec trade - plans that came to naught - and of the still more ancient history of the slaughter of Micmac Indians by the fierce Iroquois that gave Massacre Island its name.

On June 19th the SARA was off Metis where the sawmills of Mr. Price were in operation, and by evening had reached Cap Chat, the boundary of the District of Gaspé. From the sea the Abbé noted that the "Chickchok" mountains behind Cap Chat still had snow patches on their northern slopes. Ten leagues across the widening St. Lawrence from Cap Chat was Pointe-des-Monts where a lighthouse stood to warn mariners. Only six families lived at Cap Chat in 1836, the local Chapel was in ruins, and the settlers were dependant for religious service on the Mission of St. Anne-des-Monts.

ST-ANNE-DES-MONTS

In the evening of June 19th the SARA came to anchor off St. Anne-des-Monts as the Captain was not familiar with the channel that gave access to the harbour within the barachois of the St. Anne River. The arrival of the Bishop was announced by the firing of the SARA's small cannon and a local pilot came off in a fishing boat to guide

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the schooner into the harbour. It was low tide and as the SARA approached the channel entrance she grounded on an underwater sandbank and lay tilted over on her side. Luckily the vessel was not damaged and was floated off at high tide and moored safely in the lagoon behind the bar.

In 1836 the Seigniory of St. Anne-des-Monts was held by the Québec merchant, M. Buteau. The Manor House and Chapel stood near the sea on the sandy peninsula of the St. Anne River barachois and the homes of the thirty-seven families comprising the settlement extended along the shore and river. Primarily a fishing station, little emphasis was placed on agriculture at St. Anne-des-Monts, though the Abbé noted that wheat would ripen and that there was land suitable for farming. The summer climate was temperate, the river teemed with fine salmon and trout and the barachois was the haunt of a variety of wild fowl. Here Abbé Ferland witnessed the taking of salmon at night by flambeaux and spears.

The cod fishing season began with the arrival in early June of the schools of capelin - schools so dense that it was difficult to penetrate them with an oar. The cod followed the capelin and, in season, fishermen could catch up to 600 a tide.

The Bishop was received by the Seigneur and by the missionary of the District of Gaspé, Father Edouard Montminy, whose immense territory extended from Point Maquareau, Bay Chaleur, to Mont Louis on the St. Lawrence. To receive the faithful from neighbouring communities such as Petit St. Anne, the fief of the Vallée family, the Bishop and his party remained at St. Anne-des-Monts until the morning of June 21st.

ON TO FOX RIVER

Sailing eastward from St. Anne-des-Monts, Abbé Ferland remarked on the rugged nature of the coast with occasional waterfalls from the mountains to the sea. Twelve leagues beyond St. Anne the SARA passed Mont Louis with its tiny settlement of three families. A single family then lived at Grand Etang where great hopes for slate quarries had died during the French Regime. By the morning of June 22nd the SARA was off Magdalen River, prompting the Abbé to recall the legends linked to that isolated locality. By evening, Fox River, a fishing station of importance - home port of some forty fishing craft, was reached.

One of the first impressions of Fox River, recorded by the Abbé Ferland was of its semi-circular bay, a mile in diameter, with a fine beach on the seaward side of the Fox River barachois. The bay provided shelter for shipping except in the case of wind from the North. There was good, alluvial soil along the river yielding crops of wheat, barley, oats and potatoes. The resident population of some eighteen families included some who were of English origin but the Abbé remarked that the inhabitants spoke French and English "aussi mal". Provisions were expensive, partly because the captains of trading vessels feared this coast of Gaspesia with its reputation for storms and shipwreck. However, a trading schooner of a Jersey firm was in Fox River harbour when the SARA arrived there.

FISHERY AT FOX

In commenting on the fishery at Fox River, Abbé Ferland noted that, in season, many young men came to this fishing station from the older parishes below Québec to hire on with beach masters on a "half-line" basis. They were supplied with fishing craft, lines, hooks, nets and salt. Food and lodging were provided in cook and bunk rooms near the beach. Working in pairs, these fishermen sought their own bait and caught, landed, split, salted and dried their catch. It was hard, demanding work - in season a fisherman might work twenty or more hours per day. As the cod fishing season waned it was followed by a mackerel fishery. On occasion, haulibut were taken. Fox River had a pervasive smell of the cod fishery, even to the small Chapel that had been washed for the Bishop's visit with soap made from cod oil. At the end of the fishing season the transient fishermen received half the value of their summer catch before leaving Fox River to return to their respective parishes along the St. Lawrence.

TO GRIFFON COVE

On sailing from Fox River, bound for nearby Griffon Cove, the SARA encountered stormy weather which obliged her Captain to run well off-shore to seek safe sea-room. On the morning of June 24th the weather improved so as to permit an approach to the harbour of Griffon Cove which the Abbé described as "difficult". Once within the harbour they found two other schooners there trading flour and other merchandise for fish. The fishery firms of JANVRIN and LE BOUTILLIER + BUTEAU appeared to compete for the Griffon Cove

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trade.

The resident population of Griffon Cove in 1836 consisted of fifteen families. Of these the Abbé noted that the main families were those of ENGLISH; SINNOT and BOND.

A small stream flowed into Griffon Cove and had produced a barachois typical of many Gaspesian fishing stations. The barachois served to shelter the fishing craft, the stream supplied the fresh water needed for the fishery and the beach was ideal for the flakes on which the cod were sun-dried. The Abbé did not see much evidence of agriculture at Griffon Cove.

ON TO GASPÉ BAY

Again, on leaving the sheltered harbour of Griffon Cove, the SARA encountered strong wind and heavy sea. A schooner bound from Bay Chaleur to Québec was hailed and a whaling schooner of Gaspé Bay with its two whaleboats slung on either side, ready for action, passed nearby. It was noted by the Abbé that whaling had been neglected by French-Canadians and that it was the "Scotch" of Gaspé Bay who had initiated and pursued this fishery with success.

As the SARA passed Cap-des-Rosiers and the Forillon came into view, Abbé Ferland marvelled at the rugged cliffs rising some 700 feet sheer above the waters of the St. Lawrence. The impression he had was of a great mountain that had split asunder and with half of it rising above the waves. He was not surprised that this locality abounded in tales of storm and shipwreck. At the very tip of the Forillon the stone sea-stack known to mariners as LA VEILLE still stood in 1836.

GASPÉ BAY

Rounding Cape Gaspé, the SARA's course lay up magnificent Gaspé Bay, one of the great natural harbours of the eastern coasts of North America. The Abbé noted the fishing stations of the Channel Islanders at such locations as St. George's Cove, Indian Cove and Grand Greve along the south shore of the Forillon and noted that the opposite shoreline was less rugged. The SARA came to anchor at Douglastown to permit the Bishop to visit that community of some forty families.

Douglastown, at the mouth of the River St. John, had been laid

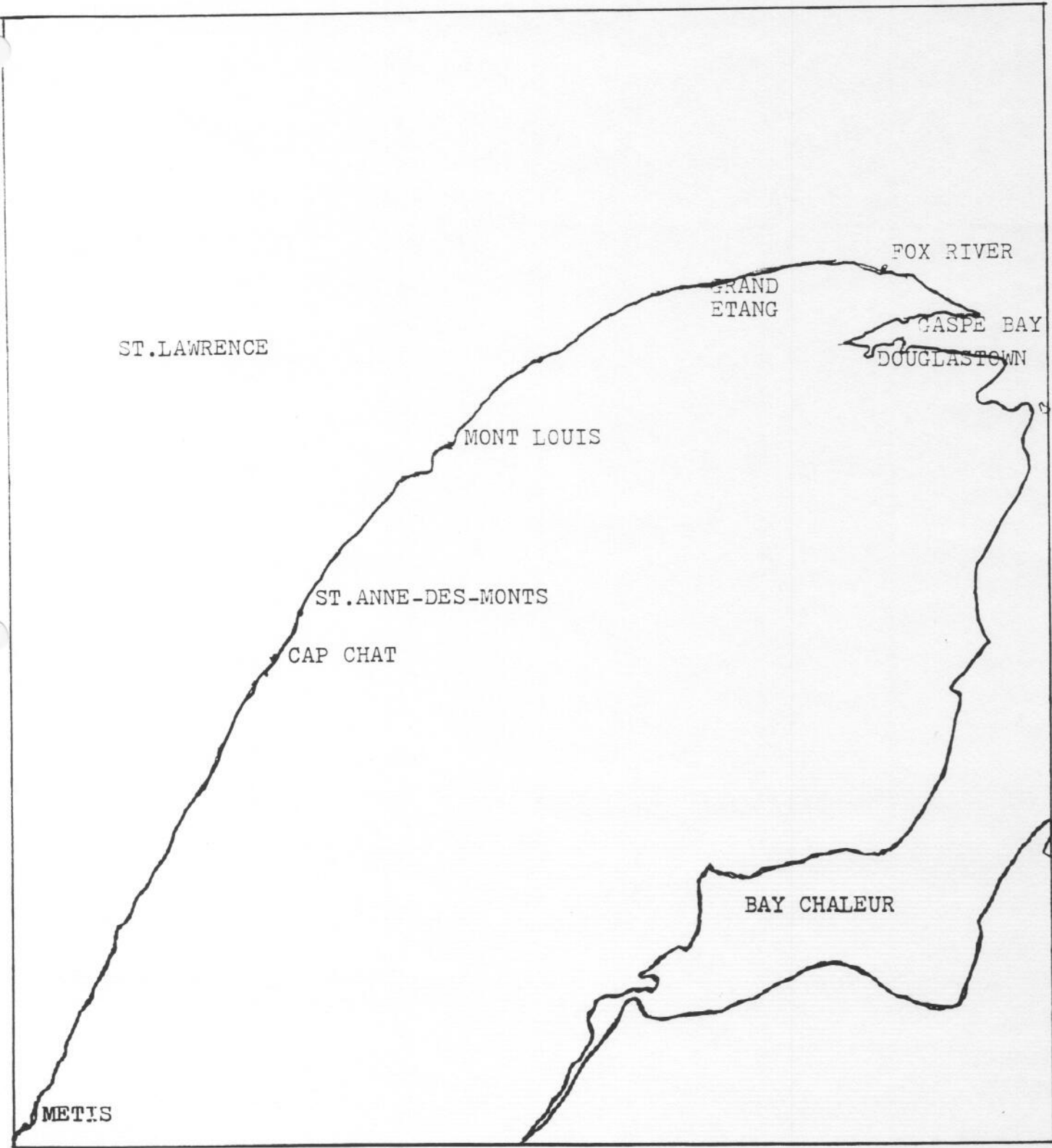
out as a townsite for Loyalists and veteran soldiers of the American Revolutionary War. The Abbé noted that most of the families were English-speaking and observed that they were a polite, intelligent, religious and well-educated people. Douglastown had been fortunate to have schoolmasters for many years.

Fishing was the mainstay of the Douglastown people, store goods being paid for with cod. From 1832 the tuna fishery had become important - the "horse mackerel being taken by harpooning. A single tuna could fill three barrels and be sold for \$6.00 per barrel.

PENINSULA POINT EXPEDITION

Having seen one of the Gaspé whaling schooners in the Gulf and having heard at Douglastown that the base of the whalers was located at Peninsula Point, the Bishop expressed his wish to visit there. Accordingly, plans were made to go to Peninsula from Douglastown by boat. The impressions of that visit and the continuing report of the Abbé Ferland will be recalled in Part II of this GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE.

CASPE BAY



ROUTE OF THE "SARA" TO GASPE BAY - JUNE, 1836