

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

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THE LOYALIST SETTLEMENTS ON THE GASPÉ PENINSULA

The account of Prof. Wilbur H. Siebert of Ohio State University presented to the Royal Society of Canada in May, 1914 and published in the Transactions of the Royal Society for 1914.

Prof. Siebert's article provides a sequel to his account of the temporary settlement of the Loyalists at Camp Machiche which has been recalled in a previous issue of GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY.

KEN ANNETT

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PREFACE

The successful Loyalist Days of the summer of 1984 celebrated the bicentennial of the dramatic and significant movement of Loyalist families to Gaspesia in 1784. Though much is known about the people and events that constitute the Loyalist story much also remains to be found, recorded and appreciated. To that end the following article of Prof. Wilbur H. Siebert makes a contribution.

The Loyalist Settlements on the Gaspé Peninsula.

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(Presented by W. D. LESUEUR, F.R.S.C.)

(Read May 27, 1914.)

In his efforts at the close of the Revolution to find suitable places for the settlement of those Loyalists who had taken refuge in Lower Canada, Governor Haldimand sent Captain Justus Sherwood, a trusted refugee from Vermont, to view the region round the northern side of the Bay of Chaleurs. This region is part of the Gaspé Peninsula, which forms the eastern extremity of the Province of Quebec, between the Gulf of St. Lawrence on the north and Chaleurs Bay on the south. The eastern end of the peninsula is deeply indented by Gaspé Bay, after which was named the administrative district that included most of the peninsula and therewith the scattered, little settlements of the French on its several shores.

Captain Sherwood left Quebec, May 29, 1783, in the treasury brig *St. Peter*, with his family, and bearing a letter of introduction from Haldimand to Captain Hugh O'Hara at Gaspé Bay. The letter stated that Sherwood's mission was to seek a location for a settlement on the Bay of Chaleurs, and directed that everything in the way of information and assistance be supplied him.¹ On June 7 our explorer reached his destination and landed his family at Captain O'Hara's, where he was well received. In his journal of this expedition, which is still preserved among Haldimand's papers, Sherwood tells us that O'Hara showed himself very ready to serve the distressed Loyalists, assisted him in the exploration of the country at Gaspé, and accompanied him on his journey to Chaleurs Bay. Sherwood's observations were extended to the situation, soil, climate, and products of this region. Concerning the first named district Sherwood reported that there was a quantity of level land of good soil and sparsely tim-

¹Second Report, Bureau of Archives, Ont., Pt. II, 957; Haldimand Papers, B. 178, p. 197; B. 202, p. 142.

bered on the north and south arms of Gaspé Bay, the amount on each being sufficient for the sustenance of forty or fifty families. He also found an equal quantity on the River St. John, which empties into the bay, a locality which he described as a very pleasant place for about forty inhabitants, who would find the river abounding with salmon and the bay well supplied with codfish, eels, lobsters and other fish. Point St. Peter he recommended as a site for a fishery, but remarked that the soil there was not fit for cultivation, while Point Percé possessed the advantage in this respect, affording two hundred acres of good level land fronting on the sea. Here there was room for a town of about a hundred houses, with space sufficient for fishing grounds, gardens, and other conveniences.

On June 16 Sherwood and O'Hara arrived at Pabos, where they noted the fine harbor with its narrow entrance "somewhat difficult for large vessels," and they noted also the fertility of the soil. The neighboring rivers were discovered to be stocked with trout and salmon and the mountains covered with timber in abundance. The prime value of the place lay, however, Sherwood judged, in its fine situation for a fishery. Next to Pabos, Paspebiac was recommended for its advantages for fishing and trade and for its soil which, the prospector declared, was the best he had seen in the gulf. The visitors found Bonaventure, with its fine harbor and wide extent of level country, already thickly populated; they formed a good opinion of the region on the Cascapedia River where the town of New Richmond was soon to spring up, and also of the land on the Grande Nouvelle. Sherwood praised the climate of Chaleurs Bay, and estimated that 1,500 families might immediately settle at the various places visited, namely, Pabos, Paspebiac, Bonaventure, Cascapedia, and Nouvelle, while at least two hundred more might be advantageously settled from Percé to Gaspé. He suggested that intending colonists should be supplied with stock, farming tools, and other things necessary; but he protested against the practices of a few designing traders, who kept the inhabitants in debt.

The last stage of the Captain's journey of inspection took him to the River Miramichi to the south of the Bay of Chaleurs. He entered this river on July 1, and described it as a fine stream abounding in various kinds of fish and navigable for vessels of a hundred tons up to its fork, above which there was good land sufficient for 500 families. By July 14 Captain Sherwood and his companion were back at Gaspé. Thence he departed with his family for Quebec on the 20th, arriving at the latter place on August 12th. His report to Haldimand was written less than a fortnight afterward.¹

¹ Haldimand Papers, B. 169, pp. 5, ff.

The favorable character of this report led the Governor General to encourage Loyalists to settle on the Bay of Chaleurs, among the various districts that were then being opened to their occupation. Accordingly, towards the close of February, 1784, and again early in May, information was published in Quebec and sent to the several localities where the refugees were quartered that those desiring to take up lands in the region indicated should hand in their names and prepare to embark on the shortest notice. Word of the time and place of departure was to be announced later. The official correspondence of the period shows that the first embarkation was to take place at Quebec about May 24, although it did not actually occur until June 9. The response on the part of the refugees was ludicrously disproportionate to the extensive area mapped out for

colonization in Sherwood's report. On the date named only three hundred and fifteen persons sailed in the brigs *St. Peter*, and *Polly*, the snow *Liberty*, the hoy *St. Johns*, and the four whale boats that completed the convoy. Of the passengers one hundred and twenty-nine were men, fifty-two, women, and one hundred and thirty-two, children. They went provisioned from the first of June to the last of August. On July 11 thirty-one men of the late 84th Regiment departed for the same destination, for the purpose of establishing a fishing settlement; on July 31 thirty-six persons followed with stores and provisions; on September 10, three men, and on November 8, twenty-one persons, with stores and provisions. According to this enumeration of the settlers going to the District of Gaspé, the total was only four hundred and six.¹

The business of assigning lands to these settlers was entrusted to Nicholas Cox, lieutenant governor of the District. On June 18 Cox was at Percé, where he met the brig *St. Peter* and her passengers, evidently the first to arrive. At the end of the week the Loyalists proceeded to Paspébiac, where they were sent ashore to view the land, but—according to the Lieutenant Governor—"could agree to nothing." On Cox's recommendation Bonaventure was next visited, because it afforded a convenient landing-place, a quantity of supplies, and a shelter for the women and children. Attracted by the improvements of the Acadian inhabitants of the neighborhood, the Loyalists were not above proposing to deprive these people of their homesteads in order to satisfy at a stroke their own needs; but when this was declared impossible, they decided to return to Little Paspébiac, which the Lieutenant Governor considered the best site for a town. Matters now went forward rapidly: the early days of July found

¹ Haldimand, Papers B. 222, pp. 83, 84; B. 63, pp. 263, 285, 289, 294; B. 168, pp. 30-35; B. 64, pp. 41, 238.

O'Hara occupied in laying out the Township of Paspébiac, and George Geddes similarly occupied at some other point not designated. Already the refugees with O'Hara had planted their potatoes, and were petitioning for three months' provisions in addition to what they had brought with them, besides requesting a supply of boards, nails, seines, etc. A month later they had drawn their lots in the new township. As Paspébiac was to be a fishery, it was laid out in the form of a parallelogram, so as to include the beach and adjoining marsh; and provision was made for a reservation in the rear, partly to preserve a supply of timber, and partly to protect from molestation a score of families who had been living there for some years.¹

Some of the disbanded soldiers among the new settlers had already begun to give trouble, and Cox suggested to Haldimand the appointment of a sheriff and several justices of the peace to maintain order and administer the law. Another source of disturbance to the new settlements was a party of American fishermen who, arriving in four vessels early in July, disembarked at Point St. Peter, Bonaventure Island, and Bonaventure, and there erected their fishing stages. Cox at once reported this intrusion to the government at Quebec, and received instructions to warn the trespassers off immediately and give them notice that the matter had been communicated to the British admiral stationed at Halifax. By the vessel bringing these instructions Governor Haldimand forwarded a hundred stands of arms with ammunition, besides other supplies. The arrival of these bounties was acknowledged by Cox in a letter of August 25,

in which he expressed his belief that the Americans would not leave the coast unless forced to do so.²

The same letter bore testimony to the progress of the settlement at Paspébiac, for it reported that the refugees there were cheerfully occupied in building their homes and were becoming more and more pleased with their lands. Moreover, a memorial accompanied the letter, signed by Thomas Pryce Jones, Captain Azariah Pritchard, and other Loyalists, asking permission to erect a grist-mill for the benefit of the settlement. An unsigned memorandum, which was written a few days later than Cox's letter, presents the busy scene of men, women, and children all engaged in clearing their lots and putting up their abodes, and predicts that in eighteen months, when their garden produce and crops are gathered, they will need no further assistance. The writer adds enthusiastically that it is the best country for a poor man that he has ever seen, on account of the great quantity of fish, game, and timber, and the fertility of the soil. Even small

² Haldimand Papers, B. 202, pp. 186, 164, 196.

³ *Ibid.*, B. 202, p. 168; B. 61, pp. 109, 112-114; B. 202, pp. 201, 195.

plots, he continues, worked by the fishermen in the most slovenly manner, produce exceedingly good wheat, peas, potatoes, flax, etc., and the industrious are always sure of a good market.³

In settling the Loyalists and in distributing their provisions, clothing, and implements, Captain Law had rendered important services, which were highly appreciated by Lieutenant Governor Cox. Moreover, the latter thought that the new settlements needed special supervision, and recommended Law as a suitable person to exercise this function over them. Haldimand acted on the suggestion and, November 2, 1783, appointed Captain Law as superintendent in the District of Gaspé, with authority in all matters pertaining to the Loyalists. He also authorized Cox to commission him as justice of the peace and Thomas Mann as sheriff.⁴

Meanwhile, the colony at Paspébiac had spread to the lands contiguous to the first township surveyed by Captain O'Hara, and some of the refugees had settled at Gaspé, where they founded Douglas-town. In both localities fishing became one of the chief occupations, as shown by the official report of November 10, 1784. This report stated that during the previous months the new settlers at Gaspé and the Bay of Chaleurs had exported 25,500 quintals of dried codfish.⁵ At the close of June, 1785, O'Hara reported from the former place that the catch had been good up to that time, and that the Loyalists of both his neighborhood and the Bay of Chaleurs were improving their lands "in spite of some restless spirits among them." He called attention to the inconvenience to which vessels trading in Chaleurs Bay were put by having first to enter and clear at Gaspé, and enclosed a memorial asking a change. The change contemplated was the establishment of a customs-house, of which O'Hara wished to become collector. In another letter, dated September 12, he mentioned that Cox had transferred the seat of government from Percé to the Bay of Chaleurs.⁶

We are able to get some idea of the distribution of the Loyalists in the region whose newly acquired importance was thus recognized by Cox from the register of inhabitants which that official prepared in 1786. From its pages we find that three had taken up lots at Port Daniel, sixteen, at Hopetown, nine, in the Township of New Lake,

seventeen, in the Township of Cox's Lakes, and eighty-five in the

¹ Haldimand Papers, B. 202, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, B. 64, pp. 379, 386; B. 202, p. 204; B. 64, pp. 100, 112-114, 379, 380.

³ *Ibid.*, B. 202, pp. 196, 218; LeMoine, *Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*, 13;

Haldimand Papers, Q 24-1, p. 61.

⁴ Haldimand Papers, B. 202, pp. 218, 222.

Township of Paspébiac, including Cox himself.¹ The register also shows that most of these settlers were farmers and fishermen, although there was a sprinkling of artificers and tradesmen. Light on the previous condition of these people is derived from their testimony before the commissioners of Loyalist claims in 1786 and 1787. From this source it appears that some of them had been persons of property in Albany and Charlotte counties, New York, at the outbreak of the Revolution, had joined Burgoyne's expedition down the Hudson and later served in various Loyalist regiments, including Jessup's, Peters' and Rogers' corps, and the King's and Butler's Rangers. At the close of hostilities a few of these provincials were quartered at Machiche until they were sent to Chaleurs Bay, where a group of them took part in settling New Carlisle.² The families of several other refugees joined the small settlement of French Canadians at New Richmond near the head of Cascapédia Bay, among these being Captain Azariah Pritchard and his household.³ As Pritchard was one of the most notable Loyalists in the Gaspé Peninsula, it may not be out of place to say something concerning his record. He was one of a number of Connecticut men—among them, his father and brother—who adhered to the cause of the Crown. During the opening months of the Revolution he carried on operations at Milford, in southwestern Connecticut, assisting not less than one hundred and sixty men across the sound to Long Island. In 1777 he was tried by court-martial at New Haven for conveying intelligence to the British, and was acquitted, he tells us, by "bribing the presentor." He then made his escape to Canada, and for three years served as a guide on the eastern side of Lake Champlain, after which he raised a company for the King's Rangers, and although commissioned as a captain continued in the secret service until the close of the war.⁴ With other Loyalists he now undertook to found a settlement at Mississquoi Bay, near the northern boundary of Vermont, but finding Haldimand unalterably opposed to the plan, decided to settle at the Bay of Chaleurs along with those he might induce to join him. As remarked above, he first located at New Richmond, but later, apparently, drew several lots at Paspébiac, and probably settled there. His military services were rewarded by a grant of half-pay as captain, which he is said to have received until his death in 1827. "He was to the last," says LeMoine,

¹ Bundle, "L. C., Administration, 1781-1783." (In the Dominion Archives at Ottawa.)

² Second Report, Bureau of Archives, Ont., Pt. I, 152, 328-331, 335-338, 344, 345, 350; Pt. II, 923, 1063.

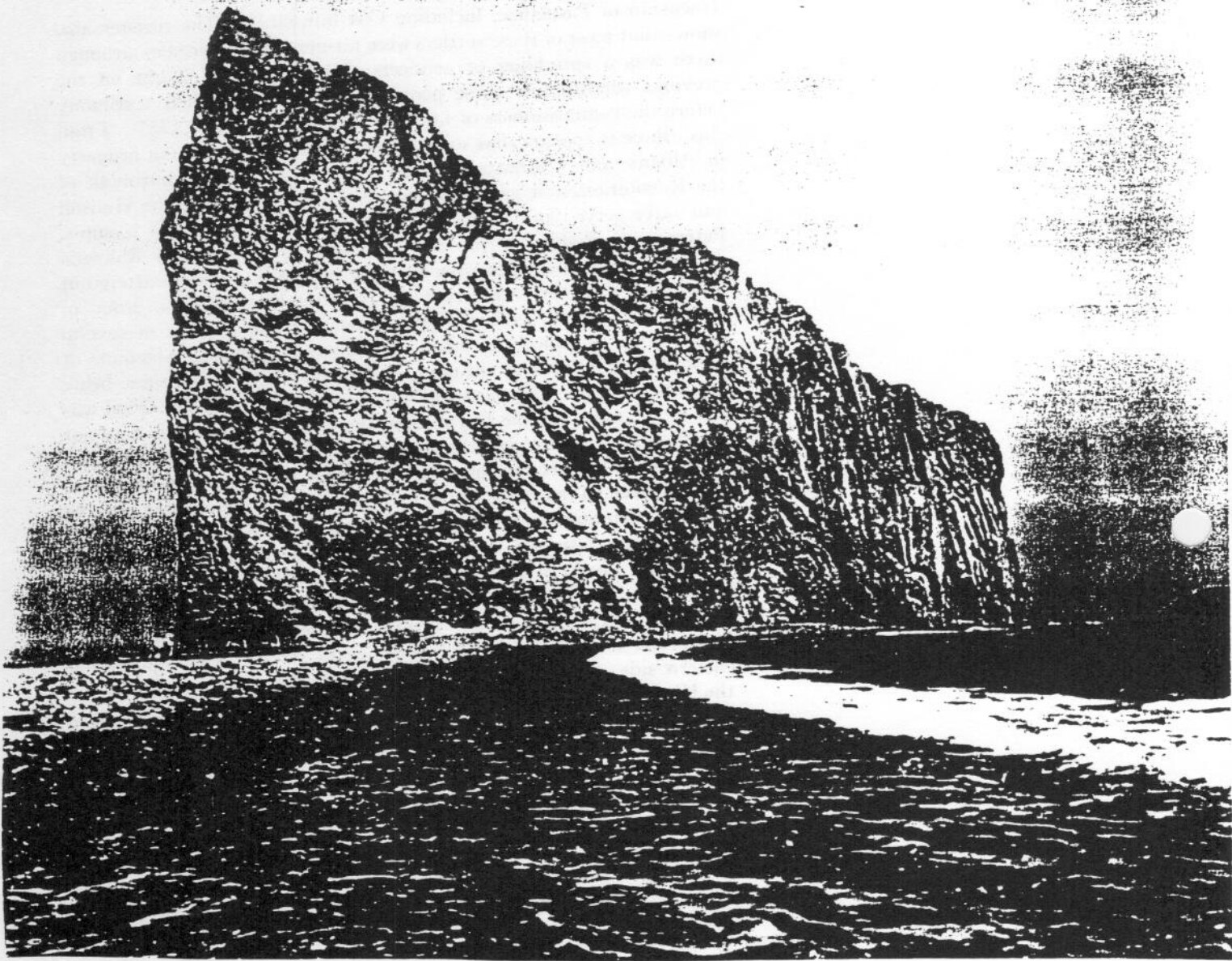
³ LeMoine, *Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*, 85.

⁴ Second Report, Bureau of Archives, Ont., Pt. I, 349.

"a stout, daring old man."¹ In 1877 when the writer just quoted visited the Gaspé Peninsula, he found there numerous descendants of the American Loyalists, all industriously employed as fishermen.²

¹ Bundle, "L. C., Administration, 1781-1783" (In the Dominion Archives at Ottawa.)

² LeMoine, *Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*, 13.



The photograph shows a large, craggy rock formation on a beach. The rock is the central focus, with a dark, textured surface. The foreground shows the dark, rippling water of the ocean meeting the shore. The background is a bright, overexposed sky. The image has a grainy, high-contrast quality, possibly a photocopy or a stylized print.