

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

1688 CENSUS IN BAY CHALEUR

Richard Denys, Sieur de Fronsac, records
settlers in Bay Chaleur for the year 1688.

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FOREWORD

The important role of the Denys family in 17th Century Gaspesia and the Bay Chaleur was recalled by "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" in its 39th issue (1982) and again, more recently, by the CBC radio program, QUÉBEC A.M., on October 17th.,1986.

As early as 1506 the Honfleur mariner, Jehan Denys, was in the Gulf of St.Lawrence and mapped the entrance to the Bay Chaleur. Nicolas Denys (1598-1688) came to Acadia in 1633, was granted extensive lands, including those about the Bay Chaleur by the King of France, and over half a century developed the fishery and trade of the region. He wrote and had published a two volume work on the geography and history of the district that remains a classic reference. His son, Richard Denys, Sieur de Fronsac, had posts at Percé, Malbay, Restigouche and Miramichi. Among other members of the Denys family active in Bay Chaleur prior to 1700 were Pierre Denys, Sieur de la Ronde, Bonaventure Denys and Father Joseph Denys.

It was in the year that Nicolas Denys died, 1688, that his son, Richard, made the following census in Bay Chaleur. Drawn from the Journals of the New Brunswick Historical Society, this census provides a rare and fascinating glimpse of European settlement about Bay Chaleur those 300 years ago.

*Census by Richard Denys of the residents of Percee, Restigouche, Nepisiquit
and Miramichi.*

The date is not given, but is fixed by correlation of the mention of events of 1688, with the statement that Richard Denys was still commander for his father, who is known to have died in that year.

The document, it will be observed, is one of the very greatest local interest.

The list of the residents who are in the Baye St. Laurent, that is to say, from le Cap St. Louis* as far as ille percee, and the names of the considerable places, the whole belonging to the said Sieur de Fronsac, commander for Nicolas Denys Esquire and Governor for His Majesty in all the Baye St. Laurent, as may be seen by his commission.

That is to say:

*Now Cape St. George, west of the Passage of Canso. The reason for the adoption of this limit, instead of the previously invariable Cape of Canso, is given towards the close of the next document.

At Lille Percee there are five principal residents.

The 1st. Is named Lespine,* from the land of Gascony and his wife, from Paris; he went there in 1678.

7. He has children as follows: 3 boys, the elder 12 years, the two others 8 and 9 years. He has two girls, aged 11 and 4 years.

The 2nd. The second is named Boissel, born in the land of Quebec, his wife is from La Rochelle. He went there in 1679.

3. He has five boys, the eldest 16 years, the others 14 and 13 and 12 and 8 years, and a girl who is 6 years.

The 3rd. Is one named Richard, from the country of L'ille Dieu at La Rochelle, a man who has served me well, and whom I have had come from France, married to a widow who is from La Rochelle, settled in 1680: she had a daughter married who is dead, and she has left a little girl aged two years.

8. She has no children by her last husband, but by the first she has 4 boys, the first aged 20 years, the second of 14, and of 10 and of 8 years, and a daughter of 7 years.

The 4th. Is one named Pierre Vallo, who is one of my employees, who has served me 8 years, and his wife is from near Paris, who has served my deceased mother,** who had her brought from France, and has served 2 years; is established in 1683.

The said persons have no children.

The concession is in 54.***

The 5th.**** From l'ille percee is named Jacque, is from l'ille Dieu at La Rochelle, his wife a native of Quebec, established in the spring of 1688.

3. She has a girl aged 1 year.

*On this man, and the others, consult the important information given under document No. 8 earlier.

**His mother was apparently living in 1680, as noted under document 4.

***This appears to be a reference to the original great grant to Nicolas Denys, but why inserted here I cannot tell.

****In the original Ms this 5th name follows on a later page, but very evidently belongs here where I have placed it.

In the baye des challeurs there is, to wit, a house and storehouse* as well for the French as for the Indians.

100 The house belongs to Sieur Fronsac, son of Nicolas Denys, where Indians I have seven men and a clerk, who work at the land and other things.

8. There are of resident Indians sixty families, without counting the children and the old men, the unmarried and the old women and widows.

The 1st. There are three residents. One is named Bouchel,** from Normandy; his wife is from Port Royal. They settled there in 1688 in the spring. All this family makes three residents.

19. He has 8 boys, who are well grown, the youngest being 12 years; of his boys there are one or two married; and he has five girls the youngest of 8 years; one of his daughters is married and has two children.

At Nipiziquit there are 3 residents who came there in 1678.

The 1st. Is one named Esnaust from Saumeur,*** his wife an Indian woman. The said person is a physician who has been in my employ.

*Of this post at Restigouche nothing further is known. Presumably it was at or very near to Old Mission, or Ferguson's Point, on the New Brunswick side of the River above Campbellton; for there, tradition and place-nomenclature agree, was the original Indian settlement of Restigouche.

**This Bouchel may be the Pierre du Lion (Pierre Bouchel dit du Lion?) of the petition, Document 11.

***This is most welcome new information about Enault: Saumeur, now Saumur, is on the Loire some forty miles west of Tours, the birthplace and early home of Nicolas Denys. This very thoroughly disposes of Cooney's statement (in his History of Northern New Brunswick and Gaspé, 30 and 168) that he was from "Basque in the lower department of the Pyrenees." Cooney also errs in calling him Jean Jacques, for various documents, later mentioned under document 18, show that his name was Phillippe, while LeClercq shows that he was Sieur de Barbaucannes. That he was a physician and had been employed by Richard Denys is also new information. That his wife was an Indian woman is confirmed by the Census of 1686, which adds that he was aged 35 in that year. Richard Denys would appear to be at least one year in error as to the time of his arrival at Nepisiguit.

From Document 18.

for Le Clercq clearly shows in his book, in the passage cited as Document 2, that he was there in 1677. Some additional important information about his lands

at Nepisiguit will be found under document 18 later. Happily also yet other new information about him is available, for in a still unpublished Report of 1724 by Sieur L'Hermitte, (which will probably appear as the next number of this series), describing fully the coast from Gaspé to Miramichi, we read under Nepisiguit:—"It has been settled by one named Osnaud, a Frenchman by nationality who here married an Indian woman. When he died he left a number of cattle which have been scattered by his children and the Indians who have taken possession of them. His wife and several of his children are still among the Indians." There appears to be no connection between this Enault and the "Enau dit Canada" mentioned by Tanguay in his Genealogical Dictionary (I, 224).

Enault's name has been spelled in at least half a dozen different ways, but I think we may well adopt as the standard form that which he signs for himself, viz. Enault, at the end of Document 18.

He has for children, 2 boys and 2 girls, the oldest of 8 years, and the girls 6 and 4 years

The 2nd. Is one named Costard, from the Country of Anjou and his wife from Normandy.

3. The said has one child by this wife, who is a boy of 9 years, by her second husband; by her first husband she has 5 boys who are in service at Quebec.

The 3rd.* Resident is named Pierre, native of Bayonne, his wife an Indian woman, established in 1678 after having served me six years.

He has one girl, aged 1 year.

*This 3rd name comes a little later in the original Ms. but evidently belongs here.

Following the baye des chaleurs from l'ille percee as far as Nipzi-quit, although this extent is great all the lands are not habitable, which brings it about that these are separated from one another, but in the places where they are there can be placed in time several residents.

- 500
Indians- 22 Miramichy is the principal place of my residence. I have there a fort built of wood** with four bastions, where I have eight pieces of cannon, two of brass, four-pounders, and two of iron, four-pounders, and four other pieces, of iron, eight-pounders and good muskets with 12 men resident winter and summer and a clerk who is in command and ten men for the fishery for cod, who go and come there in summer to fish the cod.
- In this river there are eighty wigwams of Indians who are more than five hundred persons counting women and children.
- I have a storehouse from which the Indians and French get their supplies.
- There are three residents.
- 9 The first is one named La Gasse, native of St. Martin de Re, La Rochelle, and his wife from La Rochelle. He has for children, 2 boys, the eldest of 18 years, the younger of 9 years; there are five girls, the elder 20 years, the other 16 years, the smallest 10 years.
- The 2nd. 2 Is one named Michel Degre* who has been in my service 7 years, brought here from France, native of Paris, his wife an Indian woman.
- The 3rd. 3 Is one named Lafleur, native of Port Royal, his wife, an Indian woman, settled at the entrance of the river.
- 103.** The said person has one child who is 2 years old.

These said residents include all from Cap St. Louis as far as cap de Gaspe; the reason therefor is that all the places cannot be inhabited and the foundation of the colony is to settle on the border of the sea where the ships arrive in order to facilitate their little trade. All these residents recognize me as their Seigneur, and pay me the rentals therefor. There are several places which are peopled by the Indians who receive their goods from me, and where I have storehouses for furnishing them with that which may be necessary to them.*** We have had Jesuit priests at our own expense for the instruction of the children of the Indians, and I have had Recollets for a length of nine years at my expense for the instruction of the Indians, but the bishops of Quebec have driven them from my rivers. I have received a priest from Quebec, who has been (here) two years at my expense but the said bishops have taken him from me also so that there will be none here this winter, which makes a very great injury to our Indians and French.

FRONSAC.

(Bibliothèque Nationale, Clairambault Collection, No. 1016, fol. 331-2).

*This Michel Degre appears again in the history of this region. He has already been mentioned, under Document 9 as the commander of the fort at Miramichi during Richard Denys' absence. On 3 August, 1689, "Michel De Grez, habitant de Pocomouche" was granted a league square upon the Pocomouche, on which I have recently commented in *Acadiensis*, VII, 15. In a grant to Enault of 1693 he is mentioned as having "retired with the English of Boston and married an English woman, although he was married to an Indian woman, and his marriage had been solemnized in presence of the church" (*Trans. Royal Soc. Canada*, V, 1899, II, 318, 319).

**The total number of French residents then within Richard Denys' government, and all of whom he considers as in his settlements, as recorded in the next document.

***We have no hint as to the location of their storehouses.