

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

PETER FRASER

Some glimpses of the career of Peter Fraser whose Petition of 1801 stated: ". . . . That your petitioner served as Captain of Militia at Gaspee (during the American Revolutionary War) where, having distressed the Enemy and rendered protection to His Majesty's Subjects, his conduct met with the approbation of the Commander-in-Chief"

KEN ANNETT

PETER FRASERFOREWORD

The Abbé C.E.Roy in his fine Gaspesian history entitled, PERCÉ, included a photocopy headed "LIST OF THE FAMILIES WITH THE CATTLE AND FISHING CRAFT BELONGING TO PERCÉ AND MAL BAY. 1777. At the top of this listing of interesting names of more than two hundred years ago was that of Peter Fraser. His fleet of 26 fishing craft was more than five times that of his contemporaries and required the services of 100 "servants" as compared with the 24 "servants" employed by his nearest competitor.

As the COX CORRESPONDENCE of this GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY series reflects, the period of the American War was one of great anxiety in Gaspesia as American privateers roamed the Bay Chaleur. In October 1778 a Petition signed by Felix O'Hara, Peter Fraser, Philip Journeaux, Theophilus Fox, George Geddes and Joseph Arbour was presented to Lieutenant-Governor Nicholas Cox requesting aid and protection to the end of the fishing season. This was followed by a second Petition to Governor-General Haldimand signed by Peter Fraser, Theophilus Fox, John Urquart, George Geddes and George Richardson.

Evidently Peter Fraser was a man of importance in the Gaspesia of his day. The following documents may help to provide more personal details of his interesting career.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY ROBERT SHORES MILNES, ESQUIRE, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF LOWER CANADA IN COUNCIL etc. etc.

The Petition of Peter Fraser of Green Island, Mariner,
Most Humbly Sheweth -

That your petitioner served in the Garrison of Quebec as Lieutenant of the Navy Batallion during the Blockade of 1775-6 where he did his duty to the satisfaction of his superiors and sustained a loss of his vessel and cargo.

2.

That your petitioner afterwards served as Captain of Militia at Gaspee, where having distressed the Enemy and rendered protection to His Majesty's Subjects, his conduct met the approbation of the Commander-in-Chief.

That in 1784 your petitioner went to London with General Haldimand where he was recommended to His Majesty by the Underwriters and Merchants, in consequence of which, the Governor and Council of Canada received Instructions from Lord Sidney to appoint your petitioner as superintendant of the Navigation, Pilots, Light-houses etc. of the River St. Lawrence, in which situation your petitioner served for three years, and for which he received no more than his usual disbursements, and was dismissed for the want of a fund to defray the Expenses.

That your petitioner served as Commander of His Majesty's armed schooner, MERCURY, but was dismissed to make room for Captain John Steel.

That your petitioner begs leave to refer Your Excellency to the Honorable Henry Caldwell, The Honorable Thomas Dunn, The Honorable Hugh Finlay and the Honorable John Young and to the public Records in the Offices of the Government, also copies of vouchers herewith, No.1 to 6, for his Losses and Services for which your petitioner has not received any recompence.

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that Your Excellency in Council will be graciously pleased to take his case into consideration, and to grant to your petitioner, his wife, Joseph Fraser, and six children, namely Joseph Fraser, Sophia Fraser, Peter Fraser, Jane Fraser, Malcolm Fraser and Simon Fraser, Twelve hundred acres of Land for each of the Eight, in any of the ungranted Townships set apart for Loyalists and other deserving Subjects.

And your petitioner as in duty bound
will ever pray.

Quebec, 26th March 1801

(Signed) Peter Fraser

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The Petition above bears the following endorsements:

- . Referred to the Land Committee By Order of His Excellency, the Lieut.-Governor. 2nd April, 1801 (Signed) H.W.Ryland.
- . Land Committee. The committee humbly recommend that the Petitioner, Peter Fraser, may obtain Twelve Hundred Acres of Land for himself, 200 for his wife, Joseph, and two hundred for each of his children, Joseph, Sophia, Peter, Jane, Malcolm and Simon, in one of the new Townships set apart for Loyalists and other meritorious subjects, lying to the Southward of the River Bécancour.

Quebec 27th May, 1801 Signed by Order - Hugh Finlay,
Chairman

- . Referred to a Committee of the Whole Council by Order of His Excellency the Lieut. Governor.

In support of the first item of the above petition Peter Fraser enclosed the following letter of Colonel Allan MacLean. A professional soldier, MacLean had been a tower of strength to Governor Sir Guy Carleton in the defence of Quebec from American seige in 1775-76. He had the major part in raising the 84th Royal Highland Emigrants Regiment and knew personally a number of the officers and soldiers of the garrison who would later have a role in Gaspesia - Major Nicholas Cox, Colonel Francis LeMaistre, Captain George Lawe, Sr., Captain Azariah Pritchard, Sr., and others.

Great Pultney Street S. 8 April 1786

Sir,

I received your Letter of the 6th Inst, and I do recollect perfectly that I was the person that carried you the orders from Sir Guy Carleton to lay up your Vessel (then loaded with Fish) at Saint Roc, and I at the same time did signify to you that it was his, the Gouvernor's intentions to take the Fish for the use of the Garrison, and that you told me there were

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500 Quintals of Fish on board. I also know that in consequence of the above orders the Vessel was laid up but was soon after destroyed with her Cargo by the Rebels and I know perfectly that you never received a Shilling of Indemnification for the Ship or Cargo. With respect to your services during the Siege, I do certify them to have been highly meritorious, and if you will apply to Sir Guy Carleton I am certain he will not only recollect the above circumstances but will also give you a certificate (sic) such as your conduct deserved, as he was perfectly satisfied with every part of your conduct, not only during the Blockade of Quebec but also posterior to that period and I do not know any man who has a better Claim or is more justly entitled to be paid for his losses than you have to be indemnified for the loss of your Vessel and Cargo.

I am,

Sir,

Your most obd't Servant,

To Peter Fraser

(Signed) Allan Maclean

Before me personally appeared Peter Fraser of Green Island who made oath that the above is to the best of his knowledge and belief a true and exact copy of General Maclean's letter to him of 8th April 1786 on the subject of his services performed and losses sustained, the original of which is deposited in the office of Lord Sidney.

Quebec 17th March 1801 (Signed) Donald Maclean, J.P.

Peter Fraser

Further support for Peter Fraser's Petition of 1801 came from John Schank, Senior Officer and Commissioner, who wrote as follows: "This is to certify that Mr. Peter Fraser was recommended to me as a good subject and one who had served in the Garrison of Quebec as a Lieutenant, and that he suffered much in his property, having his vessel destroyed. And I further certify that he afterwards and on many occasions assisted His Majesty's Provincial vessels under my command, and prevented some of them from being surprised and taken. And that he also saved the property of several merchant vessels which were wrecked in the River, as also His Majesty's Transport on the Island of Anticosti. And I do

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further certify that for all these and many other services during the war he never received any pay, fee or reward. I therefore recommend him to His Majesty's Officers, the Merchants of Canada, and all others trading to Quebec as capable for his advice and assistance in the Gulph or River St.Lawrence."

(Signed) John Schank, Senior Officer and Commissioner.

Peter Fraser's reference in his Petition to command of "His Majesty's armed schooner, MERCURY" is reflected in the following Order issued to him in May, 1787 by the Deputy Quartermaster General of Lower Canada. The reader will find other information on the life and times of the Lady Maria Dorchester in the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY article, THE CARLETON CONNECTION, published by SPEC June 5th.,1984.

Quebec 17 May 1787

Sir,

You are hereby ordered and directed, without loss of Time to proceed with the MERCURY schooner under your Command to Green Island and there wait the arrival of the LONDON, Captain Bealson, on board of which is Lady Dorchester and family. You will immediately on the arrival of the LONDON go on board and inform her Ladyship that you were sent to wait her arrival and to offer her every assistance the MERCURY can afford, when you will receive and follow her Ladyship's directions.

Should the LONDON not arrive before your Provisions are nearly expended, and no opportunity should offer to send you a supply, you will return so as to be here by the 24th of next month, to which period your Crew are victualed.

I am, Sir

Your very humble servant

To Mr.Peter Fraser
Commanding the MERCURY Schooner.

(Signed)

Jn. Barnes
Dy Qr Mr G1

6.

The following notarized declaration made to Charles Stewart, N.P. concerning an incident concerning Officers and men of His Majesty's Thirty-first Regiment of Foot, en route by ship to Quebec, provides an interesting glimpse of Peter Fraser in action -

BE IT KNOWN to all whom it may concern, That this sixth day of October, One Thousand seven hundred and eighty seven, came before me, Charles Stewart, Public Notary for the City and Province of Quebec, Robert Johnstone, Lieutenant in His Majesty's Thirty first Regiment of Foot, at present in this City, WHO DECLARED that in the Fall of 1782, Being in Command at Spanish River in Cape Breton with a party of the said Thirty first Regiment, he embarked on the thirtieth day of September on board the CHRYSTIE ABEDNEGO, Bradfield Master, and in company with the SPEEDWELL sailed for Quebec. These two vessels having on board the whole party consisting of seventy soldiers and seamen.

That on their arrival at Bic on the eighteenth day of October, having their Pilots on board, proceeded on their voyage. That evening, in a gale of wind with snow, both vessels struck upon the rocks which run off Red Island, opposite to Green Island, where the sea running high the vessels beat hard and soon after sunk.

That in the mean time the Boats were got out but being then dark and the snow continuing they stayed by the wrecks the whole of the night not knowing where to make the Land.

That next morning in attempting to make Green Island with a sea so heavy that the Boats could scarcely live, they observed signals from Red Island and soon after saw a Boat making for them from thence, which in coming up to them was found to be Mr. Peter Fraser with himself and six of his men, who at that time were attending the wreck of a ship and cargo stranded there some days before, and who at the hazard of his own life and of his people had put off on seeing the danger the party was exposed to from not knowing the situation of the Land. The Boats then attempting to make the shore were from the rocks and the surf the whole party must have perished.

That the said Peter Fraser spoke with each of their Boats, being four in number, and after giving them the directions to follow him, he carried them round the ridges of rocks in safety and landed the whole party on Green Island without the loss of a man.

That he made fire for them to cook their Provisions and pointed out to this Declarant and Mr. Sturdy, the only other Commissioned Officer present, the danger they would have been exposed to had they gone in shore where they proposed. From which the Declarant was and is of opinion that had not the said Peter Fraser given them the assistance here set forth, many, if not the whole of the party would have perished.

And in justice to his merit as from Gratitude for the signal service rendered to him personally, he has made this Declaration on the Eve of the Regiment departing from Canada. Mr. Sturdy the other Officer being absent, to be made use of in his favour whenever it can serve him.

After the party had recruited their strength he carried them to the main Land and Lodged them in the Houses of Green Island Parish where he procured them every assistance the place could afford, from which they marched up to Quebec and joined their Regiment.

I do hereby Certify that the foregoing
Declaration was made before me.

(Signed) Chas Stewart, Notary Public.

[Charles Stewart, N.P. began his notarial work at Québec in 1780 and his Deeds involved many Gaspesians including: James Fleming, Fisherman of Percé; William O'Brian, Fisherman of Percé; Matthew Stewart, Seigneur of Shoolbred; Annabella Stewart, the mother of Matthew; Robert Stewart; Dugald Stewart; Daniel Montgomery; Christopher Pearson; Azariah Pritchard, Sr; John McLellan; Oliver O'Hara; Louis Dubord of Bonaventure; Daniel McPherson; Richard Nevison; James Sherar; James and Andrew Caldwell and many others.]