

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE

PART III

Continuing a recall of the 1836
voyage to the Gaspé Mission by
the Abbé J.B.A.Ferland on the
schooner, SARA.

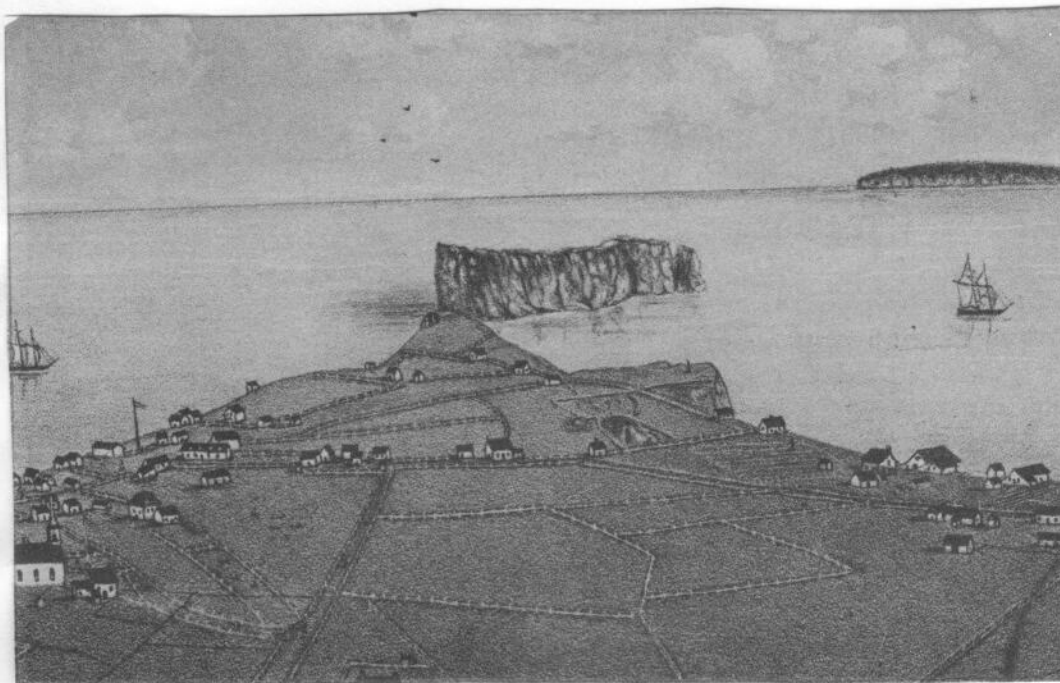
KEN ANNETT

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE - PART III.FOREWORD

Part I of this GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE, article No.121 of the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY series, recalled the start of the voyage of Bishop Turgeon de Sidyme and his party, including the Abbé J.B.A.Ferland, to the Gaspé Mission. It was on the schooner, SARA, that the visiting party sailed from Québec and travelled down the St.Lawrence, stopping at various communities, to Douglastown in Gaspé Bay.

Part II, which comprises article No.123 of the series, recalled the visitation by the Bishop and members of his party within Gaspé Bay and beyond to Malbay and Percé. Not only did the Abbé Ferland recall the stirring history of Percé but he left a vivid account of the fishery at that time and introduced men such as John Le Boutillier.

As the third part of the TRAVELOGUE opens, the SARA, carrying the Bishop and his party, had sailed from Percé bound for Bay Chaleur communities. Here, once again, the narrative of the Abbé Ferland provides a most interesting and instructive commentary on the life and times of Gaspesian settlements those 150 years ago.



GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE - PART III.

At daybreak the SARA had not progressed beyond the waters off Bonaventure Island for lack of wind but the new day brought a strong wind from the North-East that carried her along to Grand River Cove where she anchored about 05:30 A.M. The canon was fired off to announce her arrival to the missionary priest, M. Montminy, who was supposed to make the arrangements for the Bishop's party to land. However, no one seemed to take notice of the schooner's signal shot and those on board waited patiently for someone to come out to meet with them.

Finally a flat came out of the barachois with an old man at the oars. He was hailed several times but didn't seem to take any notice until his little row-boat bumped into the SARA. He seemed very surprised. He was bare-headed with long, gray hair that blew about in the wind and covered his bronzed face now and again. He stared up at Bishop de Sidyme, leaning on one oar and holding the other oar in readiness to hit the water should he detect hostility. The Bishop hailed him - "Has Monsieur the missionary arrived?". The old man replied - "Yes, Yes, I Know". "Do you know about the priest" asked one of the Bishop's party. "Yes, Yes" replied the old man and without waiting for more questions or giving any clearer explanation he turned about and rowed towards the harbour entrance with all the vigour his old arms could muster.

Half an hour later a fishing boat brought out some more responsible men and the mystery left by the first visitor was cleared up. The old man had taken the SARA for one of the schooners that traded along the coast and, as was his custom, he rowed out to board her, get the news and have a drink. When he had looked up to see the Bishop and the priests of his party he had realized his mistake. Being very deaf he hadn't understood the questions posed to him. He had hurried ashore to carry the news of the arrival of strangers and to arrange to have the best fishing boat of the settlement sent out to the SARA. As M. Montminy had been delayed by some event, the Bishop's party was not expected.

The Grand River fishing station, in common with a number of others in Gaspesia, was located on a barachois at the mouth of the Grand River. Entry to the sheltered lagoon was difficult because of a sand bank just offshore. Abbé Ferland noted that the land in the area was quite flat and of low elevation. Most of the population of the community was made up of the many branches of the same family that had been there for some 100 years.

The Abbé explained that at one time, at the end of the preceding century, these shores were rarely visited by missionaries as the vast extent of their territory made it impossible for them to visit all settlements in a given year. Rev. Girouard was at that time appointed to serve all of the Bay Chaleur coast settlements - indeed all of the District of Gaspé. Previously, Rev. Bourque had to visit no less than four hundred leagues of the coasts of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Canada. [Reference - GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY. #078 . ABBÉ JOSEPH MATHURIN BOURG. 1744-1797.] As of 1836 the missions had been divided; the pastor could more easily tend his flock and there had been a renewal of religious instruction. The Bishop's visit was enabling him to see at first hand the moral benefits resulting from a more regular presence of the missionaries among the congregations.

The soil at Grand River was fertile and it was noted that cod heads and other offal of the fishery served as additional fertilizers. In comparison with Percé the fishery was as abundant and was carried out at somewhat lower cost. The fishing boats of Grand River were of a stronger build than those noted heretofore. Fishermen built their own boats and made sure that added strength would ensure longer life. It was evident that the parish of Grand River was relatively prosperous. Abundant provisions were imported by itinerant traders. The people were not dependant on the House of Robin as were those at Paspébiac. However, there were those who lacked foresight and for whom the winter months were difficult.

The Bishop's party were entertained at the Grand River home of Baptiste Couture-Bellerive, a descendant of a companion of the martyr, Father Jogues. His prosperous life style enabled him to extend generous hospitality - his fishery business providing him

with ample revenue. On the day that he hosted the visitors to dinner he had caught fourteen fine salmon. Abbé Ferland remarked that indeed salmon was to be their fare for several more meals ;

Their host was a noted sportsman. Several of his guns - some seven feet long - hung on the walls of his living room. Each year he budgeted some 20 Louis for powder and shot. In summer, seabirds were to be found in nearby coves while autumn brought great flocks of geese and ducks. The forest abounded in big game. Most of the men of the community were hunters as well as fishermen. Regretably, hunting accidents occurred from time to time.

It was a tradition in isolated settlements that when they had no priest present the faithful gathered on Sunday at their Chapel to recite prayers, sing parts of the Mass and read the Psalms. From among them a serious and respected man who could read was chosen as a Catechist. At Grand River the Bishop found an old German soldier, STIBRE by name, a veteran of the Hessian Regiment, who had served as Catechist until his age of eighty-two years prevented him from continuing. [Reference -La Généalogie de la Famille Stibre - Michel LeMoignan - REVUE D'HISTOIRE DE LA GASPESIE. Vol.VIII - No.4. 1970.]

A CALL TO L'ANSE A BEAUFILS.

The missionary, M. Montminy, finally arrived at Grand River, having stayed overnight at L'Anse à Beaufile. No sooner had he arrived than a message came that one of his parishioners, resident at L'Anse à Beaufile, was very sick and had called for a priest. As M.Montminy was needed at Grand River on account of the visit of his Bishop, Abbé Ferland offered to make the trip to L'Anse à Beaufile in his place.

It was impossible to go by boat as the wind was contrary and strong. The only way was by land on foot as no horse was available. With a local guide Abbé Ferland set out - now along a path in the virgin forest - now along the beach. No road or bridges existed. Mile by mile, past the little hamlets of Petite Riviere, Montee du Cap, Anse du Cap and Cap Désespoir, the Abbé Ferland and his guide made their way before reaching the home of the sick person. There proved to be nothing seriously wrong with the old man of

man of some eighty years of age but the Abbé did not regard the long and difficult trek as useless as it enabled him to visit a part of Gaspesia that he had long wished to see.

THE "NAUFRAGE ANGLAIS"

Anse à Beaufils, Ferland noted, lies between Percé and the Cape named Cap Des Espoirs by some and Cap Désespoirs by others. The latter name seemed to be more appropriate as the Cape was known for more than one shipwreck. One in particular remained plainly in sight at the time of this 1836 visit. On the Point, some twenty feet above high tide mark was to be found the remains of a ship known to fishermen as the ENGLISH WRECK. To have thrown it up there the sea must have exceeded by far its normal limits. It had been there from the time of the grandfathers of the generation of 1836.

Cap Désespoirs stretches seaward towards the southern end of Bonaventure Island. The fine body of water between these points was noted for mirages. According to local tradition marvels that were inexplicable even by mirage had taken place on these waters and had been repeated several times in succeeding generations. "At times, such accounts tell, "the fishermen who find themselves near the English Wreck have seen marvellous things; a strange vision takes place before their very eyes. The sea has been smooth as ice and the sea calm, when suddenly the waters rose and became very agitated; waves rose like hills to break one against the other. Suddenly, above these troubled seas, would appear a ship with all sails set, fighting for its life amidst the raging waves. On the deck were many persons whose dress and military uniforms were those of an earlier century. Prominent among them was a man whose uniform marked him as the Commander - his right hand pointing out the dark Cape to the Pilot and his left arm about a lady draped in white. From a black sky a gale howled in the ship's rigging, The sea roared and the ship driven forward like an arrow threatened to crash upon the rocks. Then a tremendous wave rose behind the vessel and drove it upon Cap Désespoir. Cries of despair arose, among which could be distinguished that of a woman, amidst the roar of the storm and claps of thunder.

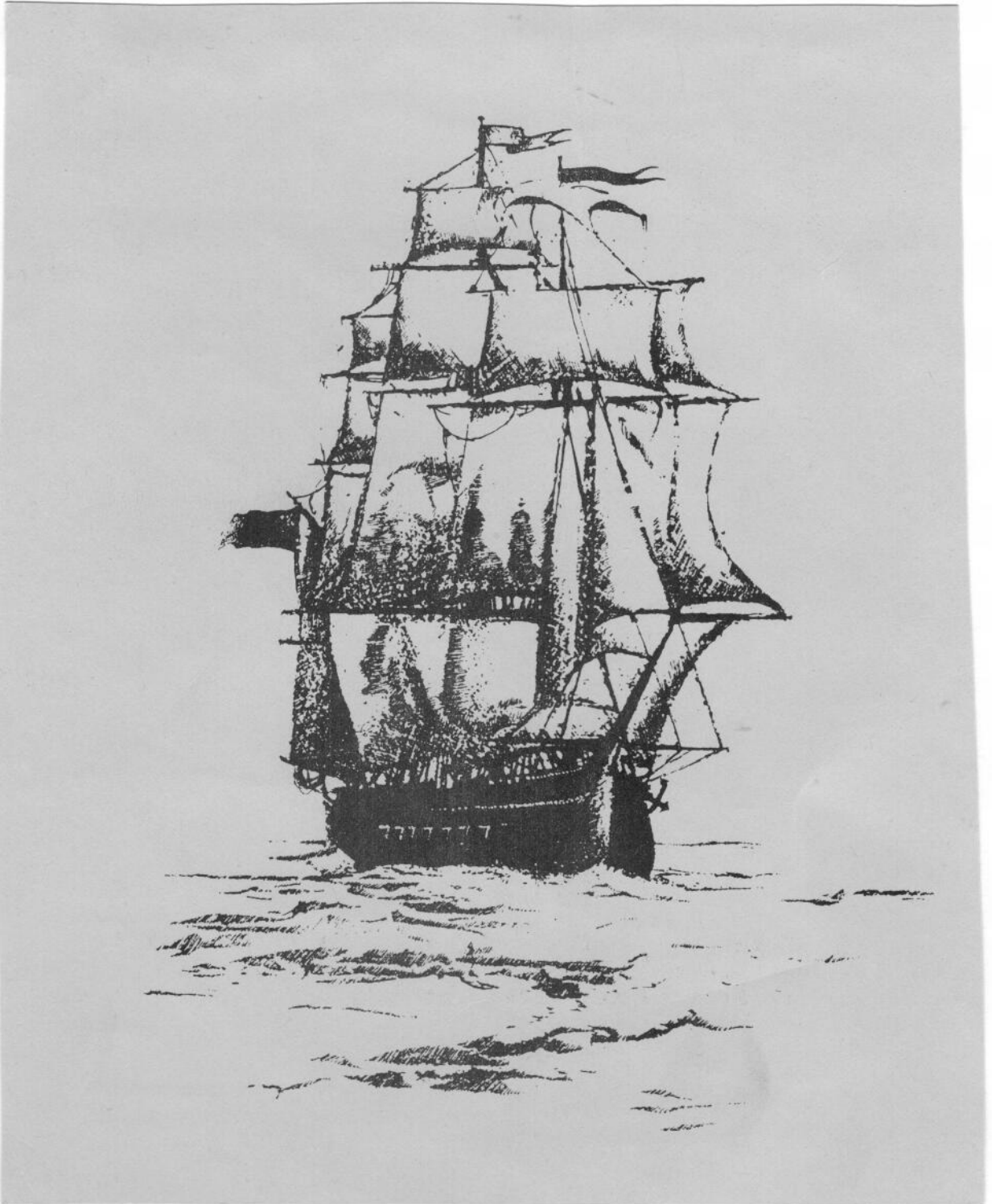
The vision fades - a deathly silence pervades the sea - the ship, its pilot, Commander, soldiers, crew and the lady in white have

disappeared . The sun shines again over a calm and sparkling sea; the waves caress gently the foot of the Cape. The fisherman is left to recount his vision of the English Shipwreck.

Abbé Ferland related the tradition of the English Shipwreck to the 1711 expedition of Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker in the reign of Queen Anne of England. This vast fleet of warships and transports assembled in Gaspé Bay in August, 1711 and sailed from there on its mission of capturing Québec and New France. Once out of Gaspé Bay dense fog and a violent storm beset the fleet with the result that eight transports and some one thousand officers, soldiers and seamen were lost by shipwreck. According to Gaspé lore it was this same storm that carried on the rocks of Cap Désespoir the vessel whose remains were referred to as the "naufage anglais".

It was nine o'clock, P.M. when the Abbé Ferland reached Grand River from his walk to and from L'Anse à Beaufile. As the Bishop had already embarked on the SARA, Abbé Ferland had a fishing boat take him out to the schooner.

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE will continue with an account of the SARA and her passengers as visits were made to other Bay Chaleur communities.



THE PHANTOM SHIP OF THE ENGLISH SHIPWRECK
LEGEND