

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

REV.MATTHEW DRIPPS

c.1768-1828

Fourth in the series of articles on
pioneer clergymen in Gaspesia prior
to resident Protestant ministers.

KEN ANNETT

REV. MATTHEW DRIPPSINTRODUCTION

It was in October, 1977, that a then youthful SPEC published the first article of the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY series recalling the 1887 visit of James McPherson LeMoine to - "A UNITED EMPIRE SETTLEMENT - THE CALDWELL MANOR" - at New Carlisle. He met there two Caldwell ladies whom he described as ; "...very intelligent and active aged damsels with an unmistakeable Presbyterian air in all their belongings..." Members of the third generation of their Caldwell family in New Carlisle, they greeted LeMoine and recalled for him some highlights of earlier days, including the following:

"...Our father, who died more than 30 years ago; said the elder, " has often told us of his youthful days at Caldwell Manor; of the excitement caused in the settlement by the arrival at Paspébiac of the first missionary, a clergyman by the name of Dweep (sic); of his riding down to Paspébiac, then, as now, the port and roadstead for foreign vessels, of his trip back to New Carlisle with His Reverence mounted on our parent's horse, whilst our dear father walked at his side through a bridle path, of the eagerness of the youths at what a real, live clergyman might look like; of the first marriage in the settlement - our father being the bridegroom and his bride our beloved mother.... of subsequent visits of the clergyman when one, when two, babies were born; of the hard lot of the unlucky parson whose room in the second story was, on such occasions, invaded by infantile music to that degree that His Reverence had to retreat to the cock-loft, which was shown to me, to prepare his sermons for the mission..."

INTRODUCTIONCTD

Other reference to the Rev. Matthew Dripps is to be found in the HISTORY OF CAMPBELLTON by John T. Reid who was the Town Clerk of Campbellton from 1906 until 1946. In the chapter on EARLY HISTORY, Mr. Reid wrote:

"...Robert Adams was shortly married to Elizabeth Busted by the Rev. Mr. Dripps, a Church of England clergyman, the first Protestant minister to visit Restigouche..."

While, as we shall see, the Rev. Dripps might have objected to the religious denomination attributed to him above, he was indeed a pioneer Protestant minister in the Bay Chaleur settlements. This is attested further by the CALEDONIAN SOCIETY OF RESTIGOUCHE in their brochure, A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ATHOL HOUSE CEMETERY AND CHURCH, where we find as follows:

"...The Athol House Cemetery is the oldest British Cemetery in Restigouche County. Samuel Lee set aside land for this cemetery about the year 1790 and a Rev. Mr. Dripps, a Church of England missionary, consecrated the ground for the cemetery. The oldest existing grave marker is dated 1791..."

FOUR MISSIONARY CLERGYMEN

In 1986 GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY undertook to trace and recall four pioneer Protestant missionaries who worked in the District of Gaspé prior to the arrival of the first resident clergyman in 1819. This recall of the career of the Rev. Matthew Dripps completes this initial project - accounts having been written previously on :

REV. JOHN MITCHELL.	1765-1841	(SPEC 20 JAN. '87)
REV. JOHN YOUNG.	1759-1825	
REV. EDWARD PIDGEON	1778-1843	

Considered singly, or in totality, the recall of these pioneer clergyman provides a unique chapter of the Gaspesian heritage.

REV.MATTHEW DRIPPS

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY WISHES TO EXPRESS THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR INFORMATION ON THE REV.MATTHEW DRIPPS MADE AVAILABLE BY MRS.EURDA LODGE HOORWEG OF SHELBURNE, NOVA SCOTIA AND MARION ROBERTSON, FELLOW, NOVA SCOTIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

ORIGIN AND
EARLY CAREER

The Rev.Matthew Dripps was a native of Kilmarnock, Clydesdale, Scotland, where ^{he} was born about the year 1768. Of his family and early life little is known.

The first thing we learn of him is his entering upon the study of Theology at the Burgher Secession Hall at its session in 1793, at the same time with the Rev.John Waddell. At the meeting of Synod in 1797 they were both appointed to the Nova Scotia Mission and the same summer he was licensed and ordained by the Presbytery of Glasgow. Soon after they set sail together for New York, it having been deemed advisable in consequence of the war then raging to take passage by that route, and in an American vessel.*

[* Reference to the naval war carried on by Britain against Napoleonic France and its allies.]

They arrived safely and Rev.Dripps proceeded without delay to his destination. He was received with great joy by the brethern, Mr.Graham, writing from Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, on the 17th of October, says -

"Yours of June 9th was handed to me by your good friend, Mr.Matthew Dripps. He is now with me. He reached this place on the 14th inst., being the Saturday immediately preceding the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. This circumstance, with many others, rendered his arrival highly acceptable. I was provided indeed with an assistant, a Mr.Munro. But help from afar and what we had looked and longed for till the heart was ready to faint, was particularly refreshing. He preached on the Sabbath evening and gave universal satisfaction. He has promised to officiate for me next Lord's Day. After that he will preach in Horton, a vacant congregation in the neighbourhood. This tale of duty accomplished.

"I propose to set out with him on a journey of 60 miles to Truro, where Mr Cocks lives and labors. And there I expect he will soon be settled as Mr.Cocks colleague"

They accordingly proceeded to Truro where Mr.Waddell arrived shortly after, and the two young missionaries were soon both employed in supplying the vacant congregations and settlements around. Mr.Graham, writing soon after, says:

" They are both perfectly acceptable and deservedly"

Mr.Dripps, however, was physically feeble and in his address not so popular as his friend. The result was that both the congregations of Truro and Stewiacke called Mr.Waddell. We have no doubt that Mr.Dripps felt the disappointment. But we may say that the two, thus closely associated in the commencement of their career, were the warmest friends till death. An anecdote often told may be given as an example of the harmless facetiousness which marked the intercourse of our fathers. Meeting each other on a rainy day, Mr.Waddell said, "It drips a little this day, Mr.Dripps". "Ay", was the rejoinder,"but we maun just waddle through it".

REV.DRIPPS The following summer the Rev.Dripps undertook an
TO extensive missionary tour of which he gives the
NEW CARLISLE following account in a letter to a friend in Scotland.

Cornwallis, Nov.16th.,
 1798

" A Small circumstance sometimes leads to important events . In consequence of falling in with a Captain Caldwell, with whom I sailed from New York to Halifax last season, I have undertaken and nearly finished a journey of above 700 miles; visiting a number of small settlements; and preaching generally twice, sometimes thrice a week, in most of the places which I visited. I was received with joy and treated with respect; and though I have just reason to complain with the prophet, "Who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed", I have at the same time good reason to believe that my labours have not

been altogether in vain.

Almost all the places which I have visited are destitute of the ordinances of the gospel, and in some of them, though settled for thirteen or fourteen years, there had never been a Protestant minister before my arrival. The settlements are generally small, and not able to support a minister, though they seem earnestly desirous to enjoy the gospel. Some of them appear to be unavoidably fixed by Providence in their present situation, and understand by experience the import of that Scripture, "Not a famine of bread, nor of water, but a famine of the word of God." Two well informed and sober missionaries might, I think, have sufficient employment, and in all probability have much success among them. A strong constitution, and a knowledge of the French language, would be necessary qualifications in those who would choose to itinerate in the places to which I allude. Among the greater part much ignorance of Christianity prevails, though I found a few well informed persons in almost all the settlements where I preached.

Captain Caldwell, whom I mentioned above, is from the Bay of Chaleur in Lower Canada, where there are a few Protestants from the North of Ireland, from Scotland, and from the States of America; they live by fishing. The Captain informed me of their destitute situation with respect to religious instruction, and wished me to go with him to the Bay. I could not then comply with his request, but promised to use my influence, so far as it would go, to procure them a supply of sermon. Accordingly, after his arrival, he informed his friends and acquaintances of our conversations and my proposal. They met, drew up a petition, and sent it round to the Presbytery of Truro last summer. At my own desire I was sent out by the Presbytery, left Truro on the 24th of July, and on my way preached at Pictou and Tatamagouche in Nova Scotia, and at four different settlements in the Island of St. Johns (Prince Edward Island); arrived at the Bay of Chaleur on the 26th of August. I remained there, visiting and preaching in different settlements till the 11th of October.

On my way to Nova Scotia I came to the Miramichi river, in the Province of New Brunswick. I travelled up the river in canoes Upwards of 100 miles; preached in six different places; walked

sixteen miles through woods to a branch of St. John river, where is a small settlement of Scottish people, mostly disbanded from the 42nd Regiment at the conclusion of the American War. I was much entreated to remain a few days and preach with them; accordingly I preached on a Wednesday, Friday and Sabbath, and came off for Fredericton. From that I came down to St. Johns river (probably the St. John settlement) eighty miles in a canoe; from St. Johns I crossed the Bay of Fundy to Digby and Annapolis, and on the 4th November arrived at Mr. Graham's, Cornwallis, with whom I expect to lodge till I get a little recruited from the fatigue of my journey.

Most of the places which I have mentioned you will find in late maps of North America. The Bay of Chaleur is about 120 miles long, about thirty miles wide at the entrance, about half way up, twenty miles broad, and at the last ends in a large river called Restigouche, where is a small settlement of Protestants whom I also visited. The mountains on each side of the river are extremely high; on the 29th of September there was a fall of snow, and the mountains were clothed in white; but since that time the weather has been remarkably pleasant; now it begins to grow cold.

On the Canada side of the Bay are three Roman Chapels, on New Brunswick side two. The Catholics are mostly of French extraction. For want of instruction, some of the Protestants have been drawn over, and embraced the Roman religion. I doubt not but an industrious Protestant missionary might be the means of preventing many, especially of the youngm from embracing the Roman religion, and of inducing others to embrace the Protestant. The inhabitants of New Carlisle and Restigouche, the two principal English settlements there, have drawn up a subscription of nearly £ 100 a year for the support of a minister; they have drawn up a petition to the Presbytery of Truro, wishing them to send to Scotland for a minister. The petition I have now with me, and shall present it to the Presbytery when they meet

(Signed) Matthew Dripps

RETURN TO
NEW CARLISLE

In the summer of 1799 Rev. Matthew Dripps was called to the charge of the united congregation of Stewiacke (or Wilmot River as it was called) and Musquodoboit, but at a meeting of Presbytery held on the 25th July it was -
"unanimously agreed to delay further procedure upon the call in

consequence of Mr.Dripps having declared himself unequal, in point of health and strength, for the necessary fatigue of the united congregation of Stewiacke and Musquodoboit."

The following winter of 1800 he spent at New Carlisle, Bay Chaleur, but by Spring his health was so broken down that he was obliged to desist from preaching. His indisposition continued for some time. Mr.Graham, writing on the 1st July, 1801 says -

"Mr.Dripps is still indisposed, unable to preach, and passes the winter with us. (At Cornwallis, Nova Scotia) The indisposition is not only a trial to himself, but to his friends and the Church in general, as his labours are greatly wanted"

MISSIONARY
TRAVELS

In the year 1802, his illness still continuing, Rev.Dripps took an extensive tour through the United States for the benefit of his health. He returned with his strength sufficiently restored to enable him to resume missionary work. At this time he travelled extensively through the Lower Provinces. In this we may well suppose that he would be exposed to the diversified fatigues and privations of missionary life at that period. " At times", said the Rev.John Sprott, "he had only an Indian for his guide and frequently slept in his wigwam, and shared the contents of his wallet". At length, in 1804, Mr.Graham mentions that he had recovered his health and was stationed at Shelburne. He was inducted as Pastor of that Loyalist settlement in 1805 and served as minister and teacher of that community until his death in May 1828

THE MAN IN
PERSON

While the record of distinguished service of the Rev.Matthew Dripps as Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Shelburne, Nova Scotia is beyond the intent and scope of this GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY article, the following personal assessment of him in that time is relevant.

"...Mr.Dripps prosecuted his ministry with diligence and energy except as he was prevented by frequent infirmities. He gave himself carefully to the work of pulpit preparation and though often in bed a great part of the week, he would come forth on the Sabbath with well-thought out discourses. From

"every account he was a faithful and in some respects a successful preacher. He was fond of books and for a man with a very limited income had collected a large store which he circulated among the people. In visiting, particularly among his sick, he was attentive and loving, and in all times of difficulty he proved himself a wise counsellor. Thus he passed through life universally respected as a man of reading and thought and venerated for his saintly character - diffusing a sweet savour of Godliness in every circle in which he moved, and quietly but powerfully influencing the intelligence and religion of the community at large..."

IN MEMORIAM

In early May, 1828, Rev. Dripps was chilled in helping a neighbour put up a fence. An attack of pneumonia followed which led to his death on May 12th. The community was grief-stricken and he was buried in Shelburne amid universal expressions of respect.

A monument to his memory bears the following inscription -

" ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF THE REVEREND MATTHEW DRIPPS, A NATIVE OF KILMARNOCK, SCOTLAND, BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION OF SHELBURNE TO WHOM HE MINISTERED IN SACRED THINGS DURING TWENTY THREE YEARS. HE DEPARTED THIS LIFE LAMENTED BY ALL WHO KNEW HIM ON THE 12th MAY, 1828, IN THE 61st YEAR OF HIS AGE AND THE 31st OF HIS MINISTRY. HE WAS A DEVOTED SERVANT OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER AND ADORNED THE DOCTRINE OF GOD HIS SAVIOUR IN ALL THINGS"

REV. MATTHEW DRIPPS IN THE MARITIMES

AND GASPEZIA

