

GASPE OF YESTERDAY

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE

PART IV

Continuing recall of the voyage to
the Bay Chaleur Mission in 1836 by
the Abbé J.B.A. Ferland and party
on the schooner, SARA.

KEN ANNETT

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE - PART IV

FOREWORD At the close of the third part of this 1836 GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE, published by SPEC on 18 October, 1988, the Abbé Ferland, together with the Bishop and the rest of his party had ended their visit to Grand River and were about to leave for other communities along Bay Chaleur.

Part IV will continue to recall highlights of the narrative of Abbé Ferland as the SARA carried his party westward along the Chaleur coast.

With a salute from the guns of the settlers of Grand River the Bishop and his party proceeded to the shore to embark on the schooner, SARA. Abbé Ferland was disturbed at the narrow escape members of this saluting party had when one of the guns exploded in the hands of a young man who had evidently loaded it incorrectly. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured. The Abbé noted that it was local custom to dip the muzzles of guns in the water before firing them in salute. It was believed that this produced more noise !

Though the SARA's captain was ready to sail there was a lack of wind. The schooner was tossed about in a heavy swell caused by strong winds on previous days. These winds had been so strong that a fishing boat manned by young Jerseymen had capsized offshore and the crew had been rescued as they clung to the keel of their boat. Such accidents were all too common, Abbé Ferland noted, because of the vanity and imprudence of young fishermen who were afraid they might be branded as cowardly if they lowered sail as the wind blew stronger.

About midday there was enough of a breeze to enable SARA to get underway but owing to a strong current setting out of Chaleur Bay towards Percé the schooner made no progress. The ship's boat was launched and four rowers attempted to tow the vessel further out to sea. It was in vain however and the SARA

drifted shoreward towards the surf breaking on the rocky shore. Finally, concerned for the schooner's safety, the Captain recalled the rowers and put out two anchors in the hope that they would hold the vessel in safety until a favorable wind permitted her to sail offshore.

WHILE AT ANCHOR

To pass the time while at this rather uncomfortable and perilous anchorage the crew and passengers fished over the side of the SARA. Some forty cod were hauled in to provide addition to the ship's fare. The cod-heads were set aside to make a kind of fish stew known in Quebec as SALMIGONDIS and among the Jersey fishermen as OUIODE.

On shore, in line with the schooner's anchorage and near a brook called BRÈCHE-A-MANON, a long ladder had been placed against the cliff so as to provide for passage from the beach to the fields above. An Irish farmer who had settled nearby used this ladder to carry up seaweed as fertilizer for his crops. For those on the SARA the sight of this ladder all too near across the pounding surf was a reminder that they might have to scale it if the anchor chains of the schooner were to give way.

With the onset of evening the weather improved and there was a magnificent sunset. Abbé Ferland was particularly intrigued by the phosphorescence in the water. The crests of the waves, the anchor chains and even the small fish playing about the vessel shone with this remarkable luminescence. So pronounced was the phosphorescence that one could easily read a book on the deck of the schooner after nightfall.

ON TO NEWPORT

About 5:00 A.M. a wind arose enabling the SARA to get out to sea. A course was set towards Pointe-au-Genièvre or Newport as it was called in English. En route the site of the Pabos Seigniory, of importance during the French Regime, was noted. It was recalled that the stores and chapel that once existed there had been destroyed. More recently some eight Irish families had taken up lands at Pabos and were growing crops of potatoes for sale to the fishermen in other Bay Chaleur settlements.

3.

In line with Pointe-au-Genièvre was a chain of rocks which rose some twelve to fifteen feet above the water. Between this peninsula and the mainland was the little harbour with its narrow, dangerous entrance. About 5:00 P.M. the SARA was only about a half league from this harbour. Several of the local boats came out to meet her - some to take the Bishop and his party to shore - others to tow the schooner into harbour.

NEWPORT

The Abbé Ferland was evidently not impressed with the Newport settlement of 1836 with its run-down cabins, its poor soil and its footpaths among clumps of spruce trees. The chapel was located near the shore. As to the inhabitants their features, complexion and hair indicated to the Abbé that many shared Indian blood. The women, carelessly dressed and with their ill-clothed children about them, peered from their cabin doorways to see the visitors pass by. The men provided a guard of welcome and fired off their guns with evident pleasure in the attempt to deafen the visiting party.

The Bishop, Mgr. de Sidyme, was received on shore by the Missionary, Rev. Montminy, who had come from Grand River in a fishing boat. The little chapel was filled for the occasion and all present heard the Word of God attentively. Then, as it was getting late the visitors returned to the SARA for their evening meal. The Abbé Ferland had lobster. He commented on the clarity of the water in the harbour and mentioned that the following species of fish could be netted there: "poules de mer"; "tanches"; "plies"; "crapauds de mer"; "capelans"; "raies"; "harengs"; "sardines"; "truites"; "loches"; "homards". It was possible to see bottom in the Newport harbour at a depth of some 35 feet.

[THE JOURNAL OF THE ABBE FERLAND THEN DEVOTES SOME PAGES TO A DESCRIPTION OF FISH AND FISHING IN BAY CHALEUR BEFORE CONTINUING AN ACCOUNT OF THE VOYAGE.]

ON TO PORT DANIEL

Charles Roussi, an intelligent and active man found at

4.

Newport agreed to help pilot the SARA to the next port of call, Port Daniel. En route the schooner sailed by Pointe au Maquereau which, with Miscou Island on the New Brunswick shore, marks the entrance to Chaleur Bay. Pointe au Maquereau was eleven leagues from Percé in direct line, some six miles from Newport and seven miles from Port Daniel. Passing this Point the SARA coasted along a magnificent shoreline with limestone capes jutting out to sea. Some were crowned with tall trees - others were wave-eaten into fantastic shapes. A bridge crossing the river that flowed out into the Anse au Gascon was noted - the only one that the Abbé had seen to date in Gaspesia. At sunset the SARA anchored in Port Daniel.

WELCOME TO PORT DANIEL

The missionary priest for the western sector of Chaleur Bay had come to Port Daniel to greet his Bishop and to invite him ashore. Though the hour was late the Bishop and his party disembarked and proceeded to the chapel where the inhabitants had gathered to receive the visitors. A local militia commanded by a remarkable lady in her sixties - "Mother" Christine - fired a volley. Born at Paspebiac this Mother Christine had lived in Port Daniel for the past forty years. The Abbé Ferland said that she commanded "like a Queen" '. Should any reader know more of the history of this "Mother" Christine it is hoped that it will be written up and published as a part of the Gaspesian heritage.

Port Daniel, the Abbé Ferland claimed, had an excellent harbour. Only South-East wind was felt in it as a circle of high hills sheltered it from other winds. Behind the narrow entrance of the bar or barachois was a kind of lake formed by the various river branches. On the low, sandy points between this lake and the bay the fishermen had built their summer dwellings so as to be near their nets, flakes and boats. Their winter houses were further inland along the river where they had a good supply of firewood and access to the forests where timber was cut for export. The previous summer (1835) some four or five large vessels had loaded timber. Port Daniel also had excellent limestone quarries and exported to other ports along Chaleur Bay. There was promise of

a coal industry based on beds that had been discovered near the river.

[Ref. GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY #207 "THE GASPÉ FISHERY AND COAL MINING COMPANY" (G.F.C.M. CO.)

The SARA anchored near the foot of what the Abbé Ferland called DEVIL CAPE - the seaward point of the limestone ridge that forms the eastward boundary of the Port Daniel Basin. He noted a similarity to Quebec City's CAPE DIAMOND.

At that time the population of Port Daniel consisted of some twenty five to thirty families. Conditions were primitive and the Bishop's party had some difficulty with language as the people had expressions quite particular to their community. It was noted that the climate was more temperate than at Percé and that, in general, it was possible to sow for crops during the first week of May. As to fishing, while cod were not as abundant, Port Daniel had an excellent salmon fishery. In a single day one fisherman took 68 fine salmon, each weighing some 25 to 30 pounds.

It is of interest to recall that three hundred years before this visit of the SARA to Port Daniel that intrepid mariner, Jacques Cartier, had spent some days there. Here is the text of his ship's LOG:

"...LE QUART JOUR DUDIT MOYS (July, 1534) JOUR SAINT MARTIN, RANGEAMES LADITE TERRE DU NORT POUR TROUEZ HABLE, ET ENTRAIMES EN UNE PETITE BAYE ET CONCHE DE TERRE OUUERTE DEUERS LE SU, OU IL N'Y A AULCUN ABRY DUDIT VANT, ET LA NOUMAMES LA CONCHE (ANSE OR COVE) SAINT MARTIN: ET FUSMES DEDANS LA DITE CONCHE DEMPUIX LE QUART POUR JUSQUES AU DOZIEME JOUR DUDIT JUILLET..."

It was during this stay at St. Martin's Cove (Port Daniel) that Jacques Cartier took the ship's boats to explore the Bay Chaleur as far as Restigouche.

