

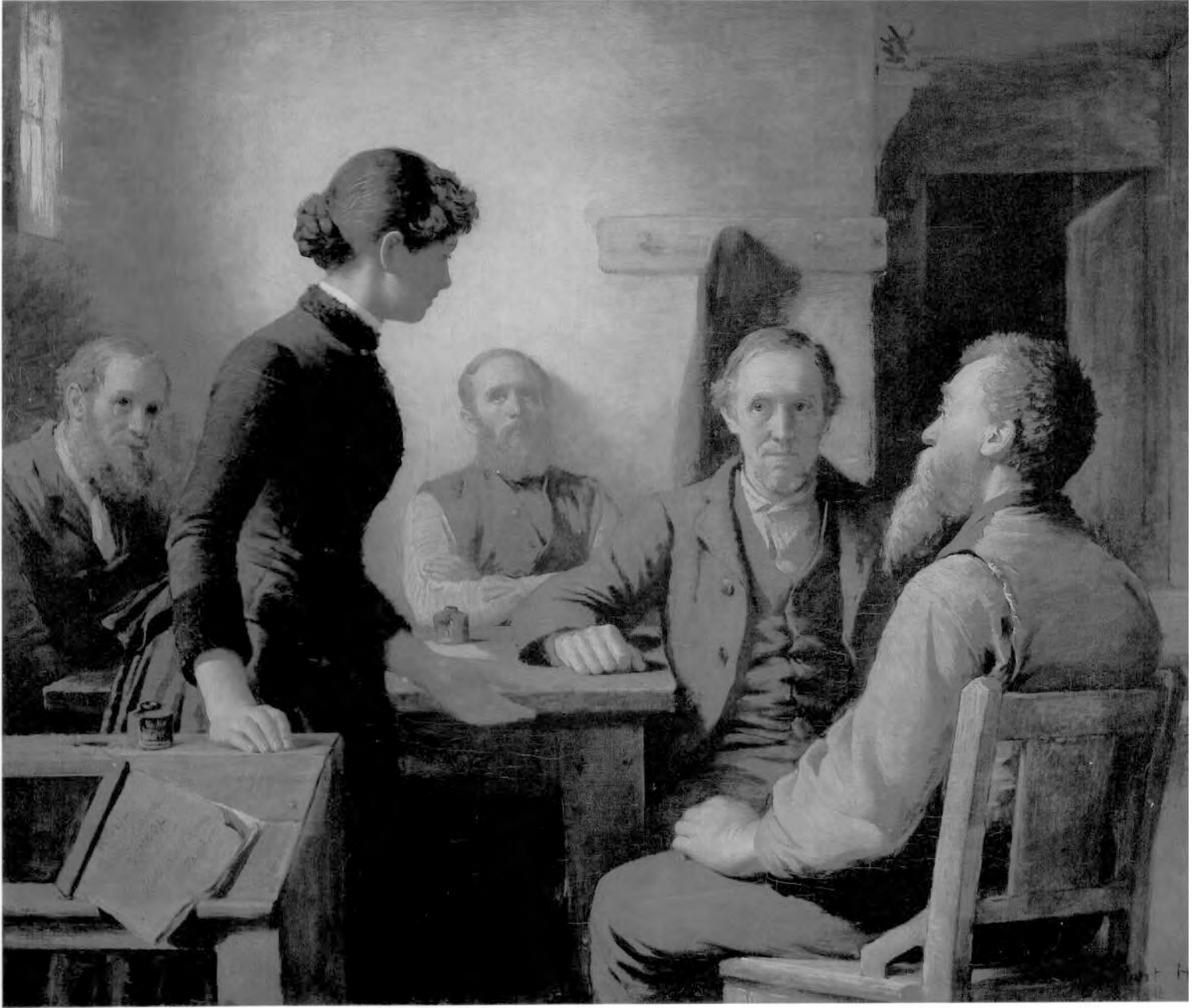
GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

EDUCATION FLASH-BACK TO 1890

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From the view-point of 1990, GASPÉ  
OF YESTERDAY recalls items and issues  
of education at the local, regional  
and provincial levels in 1890.

KEN ANNETT



Robert Harris  
**A Meeting of the School Trustees**

EDUCATION FLASH-BACK TO 1890

In 1990, as we enter the last decade of the 20th Century, it is interesting to look back 100 years to the Gaspesia of 1890 and to recall some items and issues of education at the local, regional and provincial levels of that distant time.

THE EDUCATIONAL RECORD published in 1890 by the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction provides the following informative and interesting account of a Gaspesian school at the local level - that of New Richmond in the County of Bonaventure.

NEW RICHMOND - The following is a sketch which was written for us by Miss Lilean McRae, one of the pupils of Mrs. De La Motte, teacher in the New Richmond School.

In the year 1839 the first Protestant School House was built in New Richmond. The site was purchased from Messrs John Gilker and Robert Duthie. The building was 25 feet wide, 36 feet long, and as I believe, was the first frame building erected in the Township. It was used as a Protestant Meeting Place as well as a School House.

The building was first laid off in three apartments. The school room occupied about three fifths of the building. There was a narrow hall through the remainder of the building with a room on either side. One room was used as a dwelling for the teacher and the other as a kitchen. These rooms were lined with ceiling boards of pine. They were not painted, for paint was not as common then as it is now among the schools.

The school room was comfortable and well lighted. The apparatus of the school consisted of a small blackboard without sufficient paint to make it look black. It was seldom used except when giving instruction in singing. There were no maps in the old school, for the branches taught were Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. The study of the Bible and Shorter Catechism was for those who were thought to be advanced; but as time passed more studies were brought into the school.

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In time the building was made more comfortable. The seats were the common benches with no support for the back. Desks were arranged around the walls and a double one in the center so that pupils, when writing, faced each other.

The first teacher in the old school house was William B. Mildrum, M.D., a gentleman belonging to one of the most aristocratic families in England. There was, however, a teacher in the District, a Mr. Jeffery, before Dr. Mildrum's time, who taught for a short time in a private house.

After Dr. Mildrum the following persons taught in the school house, viz. - Mr. William Harvey; Mr. John Sillars; Mr. Thomas Morris; Mr. J. D. Skelly; Mr. Andrew Clark; Miss Jane Clark; Mr. Robert B. Kerr; Miss Lizzie McCoubrey; Miss Kate Duthie; Mr. J. Bacon; Mr. George Webber and Mr. James Harvey.

Now I will write a short story about the new and present (1890) school. It is 40 feet long and 26 feet wide. It is divided into four apartments; the largest part is the school room. It is plastered within and the wainscoting extends a few feet to protect the plaster. The floor is painted and there is a cupboard at the top to keep the books in. A teacher's desk and platform are at the top.

The building is beautifully situated on rising ground and with a few second' walk from the school we reached the New Richmond Post Office which we are always glad to visit daily, hoping that mail matters may await us. The present school was first used as a Public Meeting House, but after a time there was a Lodge built which came to be used in this way.

There is a large stove in the centre and it is very useful in winter. The building is whitewashed outside and the roof painted. There is a large playing ground around the school enclosed by a wooden fence.

The inside of the school is well furnished with maps. There was a present of nine maps given to this school and also a globe.

The teachers in this school were Miss Mary Sutton; Miss Ida Robinson; Miss Rachel Winchester; Mr. Robert Campbell; Mr. John Blue; Miss Kate Caulfield; and now Mrs. De La Motte.

A few steps to the south-east of the school is the home of

Mr.Duthie.

There are many advantages at the present time that only those who were considered wealthy could procure in the past, and it is hoped that we will do our part, since the people have done theirs, and gain a good education that will help us in after life.

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#### THE REGIONAL LEVEL

In 1890 the Rev. William Gore Lyster of Cape Cove was Inspector of Protestant Schools for the District of Gaspé, including the schools of the Counties of Bonaventure and Gaspé. From Gaspé Bay to Restigouche he visited twice each year thirty seven elementary and three model schools. The District had no Academy, College or University. As of 1890 the elementary schools had 966 pupils enrolled and as staff had three male and thirty five female teachers. In the model schools of Gaspé Basin, Paspébiac and New Richmond were enrolled 170 students taught by five female teachers. As School Inspector for this vast district extending over 200 miles the Rev.Lyster received an annual salary of \$550.00

As the official reports of Inspector Lyster have been included in this GASPE OF YESTERDAY series as article #216, only certain highlights will be recalled here.

In concluding his 1890 ANNUAL REPORT Rev.Lyster wrote: "...I think I may safely say, that of the twenty-five school municipalities in my District, five are excellent, ten good and ten middling..." The text of his report indicates that the municipalities he rated as excellent included New Richmond with its "Energetic chairman, Dr.Thornton" and the Head Teacher, Mrs. De La Motte, who "deserves much credit for having raised the school to its present satisfactory condition." Again he noted that " The model school in Paspébiac has also made progress under Miss Murray in the Model, and Miss Cole, in the Elementary Department." At Gaspé Basin the Model School had improved under an accomplished and pains-taking teacher, Miss Moss. Haldimand

as usual had two well attended schools. No.1, taught by Miss Whinfield was very satisfactory. It was the Inspector's opinion that the opening of a Model School in Haldimand would prove advantageous, there being "many respectable families in the vicinity who will gladly take advantage of it." In York, the No.1 School taught by Miss Davis, had produced shorthand of such exceptionally beautiful and correct execution that it had received high commendation from the Editor of the PHONOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE of Cincinnati, USA.

A major problem of education in the Gaspesia of 1890 was the extreme difficulty of securing qualified teachers. The Coast did not provide a sufficient number of teachers and the salaries were not large enough to induce teachers to come from a distance. As a first step in meeting this problem a Central Board of Examiners was established and held its first examinations in various regional centers in the first week of July, 1890. In the District of Gaspé such examinations were held at Gaspé Basin, where the Rev. J.P. Richmond presided as Deputy Examiner, and at New Carlisle where Sheriff W.M. Sheppard presided. Three candidates were examined at each of these regional centers and all were granted elementary teacher diplomas.

The shortage of teachers combined with difficulties arising from sparseness and poverty of population had led to the closing of some schools and the partial operation of others. Among those closed in 1890 were St. Godfroi Diss., Matapedia and Barachois diss. As for Shoolbred the Inspector reported - "The Shoolbred schools do not seem to make much progress. It is, however, rather difficult to form a judgment: for the school visited this year is nearly certain to be found closed at the time of my next visit." In Cox two teachers attempted to educate no less than 107 pupils. There the commissioners had promised to provide a new school house for their district No.2.

#### THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL

In 1890 the Mercier government ruled at Québec City with Charles Langelier its Provincial Secretary responsible to the Cabinet for education. The Hon. Gédéon Ouimet was Superintendent

of Education. The Council of Public Instruction comprised the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Committees of Education. The latter, chaired by the Lord Bishop of Québec, the Right Rev. James Williams, D.D., consisted of ten regular and six associate members with the Rev. Elson Rexford, B.A. as Secretary.

The year 1890 was marked by a divisive issue between the Government and the Protestant Committee. The roots of this problem went back to the Conquest of 1760 and the question of what should be done with the proceeds of the Jesuit Estates. In the time of Haldimand as Governor a committee had been struck to suggest a solution - a committee on which Capt. George Lawe, Sr., who had helped to settle the Loyalists in Bay Chaleur, had an active role. Now, more than a century later, the Government had presented a JESUIT ESTATES ACT offering the sum of \$ 400,000 to the Roman Catholic Church and the sum of \$60,000 to the Protestant Committee. The bitter reaction to this ACT was reflected in the following statements of dissent by the Rev. John Cook, D.D., and the Rev. George Weir, LL.D., members of the Protestant Committee.

" The undersigned protest against the acceptance on the part of the Protestant Committee of the Council of Education of the \$60,000 or any other sum as an indemnity for the \$400,000 given by the Legislature of the Province of Québec to the Roman Catholic Church in the said Province of Québec.

1st. Because, if the said \$400,000 be taken from the proceeds of the sale of the so-called Jesuits' Estates and the grant be based on the moral claim by the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church on the said Jesuits' Estates, the Protestants of the Province of Québec have no such moral claim on the said Jesuit's Estates and the offer of \$60,000 or any other sum as compensation to the Protestants can only be regarded in the light of a bribe or hush money.

2nd Because of the Jesuit Estates Act a trust established by the Crown of Great Britain for a specific purpose within the Province of Québec has, to the detriment of Protestant Superior Education in the said Province of Québec been annulled and done away with, without leave having been either asked or obtained from the Crown of Great Britain, the founder of the said trust.

3rd Because, if the money to pay the \$400,000 to the Roman Catholic Church and the \$60,000, or any other sum, to the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction be taken, as it professedly done, from the Public Treasury of the Province of Québec, it cannot be affirmed that there is any moral claim to make such grant, specially as the revenues of the Province of Québec are in large measure contributed by Protestants for civil purposes only, but there is a violation of Article 3439 of the Revised Statutes which read as follows:-  
 "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, so as the same shall not be made an excuse for licentiousness or a justification for practices inconsistent with the peace and safety of the Province, is allowed to all Her Majesty's subjects within the same."

4th Because there is no parallelism between the granting of \$400,000 to the Roman Catholic Church and \$60,000 or any other sum to the Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction - the parallel would have been to give the \$60,000 or any other sum to be divided according to population among the different Protestant Churches in the Province of Québec.

5th Because it is contrary to British principle and practice to make legislation dependent on the sanction of the Pope before it becomes law, as is done by the Jesuit Estates Act.

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TO THE ABOVE, DR. COOK SUBSEQUENTLY ADDED THE FOLLOWING:

I only wish to say, and if permitted, to put on record, that having always considered the action of the Provincial Government and Legislature, in what is known as the JESUIT



ESTATES ACT, to be, both in style and substance of the said Act insulting to the Protestant inhabitants of the Province and of the Dominion, and to the Imperial Government itself, by introducing the will and law of a foreign power (i.e. the Pope/Vatican) into a matter which concerned only the subjects of the Queen, and fell to be regulated solely by British law and usage; and further considering that the sum allotted to Protestants under the said Act, since whatever moral claim might be alleged to exist for the Jesuits, none such was or could be claimed for Protestants, cannot be reasonably regarded as other than a bribe to induce acquiescence in such insult.

I for one, cannot consent in any form or way, to the acceptance of it by this Committee.

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#### RETROSPECT

The period of 100 years since 1890 has witnessed great changes in Gaspesian education at the local and regional levels and equally major change at the provincial level. The pace of such change has been most pronounced in the last thirty years since the creation of the Québec Ministry of Education.

Gone are the many, small elementary schools of the 1890's which, despite their limitations, did provide a focus for community life. Gone are the Model schools that were the pride of their respective localities. Gone are the Inspectors of Schools of yesteryear who provided educational leadership and liason throughout the District of Gaspé. Gone too is the Council of Public Instruction with its associated Protestant Committee as a source of educational policy-making and decision removed from the political scene.

Insofar as the article above will serve to remind us of Gaspesian education of 100 years ago its purpose will have been met.