

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE PRENTIES STORY

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"...the officers and men of the 84th Regiment scattered far...some went to Nova Scotia, some to Gaspesia... Walter Prenties and his brother John established themselves in a fishing business in Gaspesia..."

KEN ANNETT

THE PRENTIES STORY

EXORDIUM Among those members of the British Army who fought and captured the great French fortress of Louisbourg in 1758 was Miles Prenties. As a soldier of marked ability he came to the attention of a rising young British Officer, James Wolfe, whose conduct at Louisbourg won for him the command of the critical expedition against Quebec in 1759. Wolfe named Miles Prenties as his Provost Marshal. It is interesting to speculate that in the interval between the Fall of Louisbourg and the Quebec expedition Miles Prenties may well have been with Wolfe and his forces in Gaspé Bay. [ Ref. "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY", No. 5 "THE GASPE EXPEDITION". It is known that he later petitioned for a large land grant in the area between Gaspé and Percé. Unlike General James Wolfe, Miles Prenties survived the Battle for Quebec and elected to remain in the Old Capital under the new British Regime.

In Quebec City Miles Prenties and his wife, Elizabeth, became innkeepers and, by 1775, owned the large stone building on rue Buade which already had a certain notoriety. Carved in stone over its entrance was an enigmatic device that invariably attracted attention, It consisted of the gilded image of a dog chewing on the thigh bone of a man, and the following inscription:

(A free translation)

" I am a dog, on a bone I gnaw  
 Biding my time I gnaw and gnaw.  
 The time is not yet but soon will be  
 When I will bite who has bitten me."

A nineteenth-century novelist, William Kirby, would one day make famous this house of "THE GOLDEN DOG". But in Prenties' time it was known simply as PRENTIES'S TAVERN - TAVERNE DE PRENTIES. Within its walls Elizabeth Prenties presided over a busy establishment, with four negro slaves, two indentured servants, and hired help as well, all to be kept to their duties.

Among the British military men frequenting Prenties' Inn and Tavern in the years after the Conquest was Richard Montgomery, a contemporary fellow-soldier of Miles Prenties and Louisbourg veteran. From time to time he was in Quebec from his American home on the Hudson River. It was particularly ironic that when Richard Montgomery, as a General of the American forces invading Quebec in 1775, was killed during the assault of New Year's Eve, it fell to Elizabeth Prenties to identify the body when it was brought from the snow outside the barricade. Montgomery's former fellow-officer at Louisbourg, Sir Guy Carleton, then Governor of Quebec, ordered Montgomery's burial with full military honours. Yet another interesting sidelight was that the funeral arrangements were made by Sgt.-Major James Thompson, veteran of the Battle of the Plains in 1759 and father of that early Judge of the District of Gaspé, the Hon. John Gawlor Thompson of New Carlisle.

#### PRENTIES

#### FAMILY

Miles and Elizabeth Prenties had three children - a daughter and two sons. When the Americans invaded Lower Canada Miles and his two sons were taken up with military duty. Miles himself resumed his former post as Provost Marshal with the rank of Captain. Sons Samuel Walter and John Thomas, the one just over twenty years and the other in his late teens, had their baptism of fire in the confused street fighting of New Year's Eve, 1775. It was in the repulse of the American attacks of that night that Captain George Lawe, Sr. won the Military Cross and mention to the King in dispatches for conspicuous bravery. Captain Lawe was subsequently Supervisor of Loyalist Settlement in Bay Chaleur by order of Governor Haldimand. Walter Prenties was Ensign in the same Regiment as Captain Lawe, the 84th Royal Highland Emigrants commanded by Colonel Allan MacLean.

#### DISPATCHES

During the War of the American Revolution the garrison of fortress Quebec faced a great problem of communications with the headquarters of the British Army in America at New York. In November, 1780, faced with the onset of winter and the close of navigation via the St. Lawrence, Governor Haldimand prepared duplicate dispatches for General Sir Henry Clinton in New York

and sent them off in the care of Ensign Drummond of the 44th Regiment and of Ensign Walter Prenties of the 84th Regiment, sailing on different vessels, in the hope that at least one set of reports would be delivered. The schooner on which Drummond sailed was wrecked in a violent storm on Anticosti Island and all on board were lost. The brigantine, "St. Lawrence", carrying Ensign Prenties, also encountered late season storms in the Gulf and was wrecked near the mouth of the Margaree River, Cape Breton. The remarkable story of that wreck and the experience of survivors was published in London, England in 1782, under the following title:

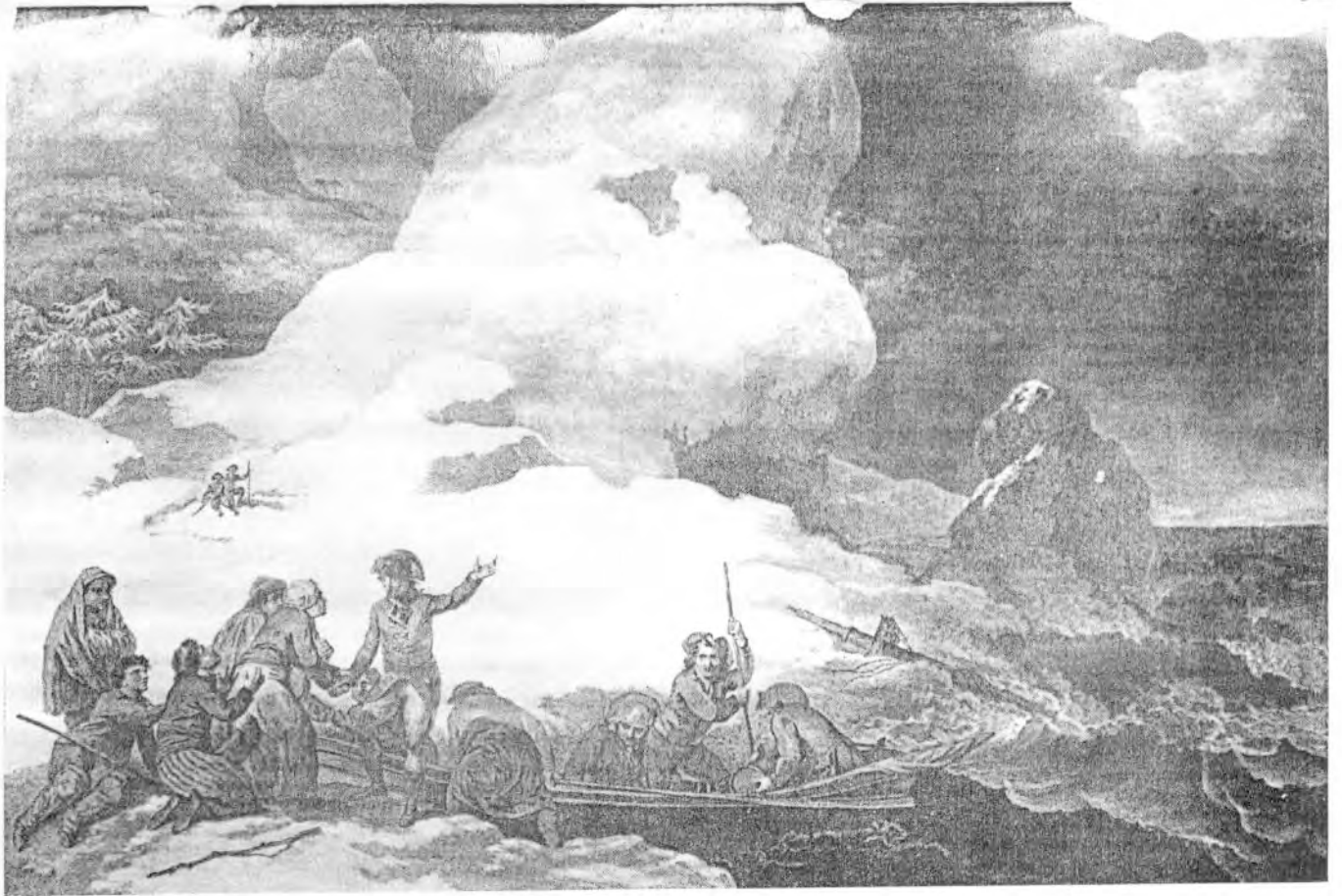
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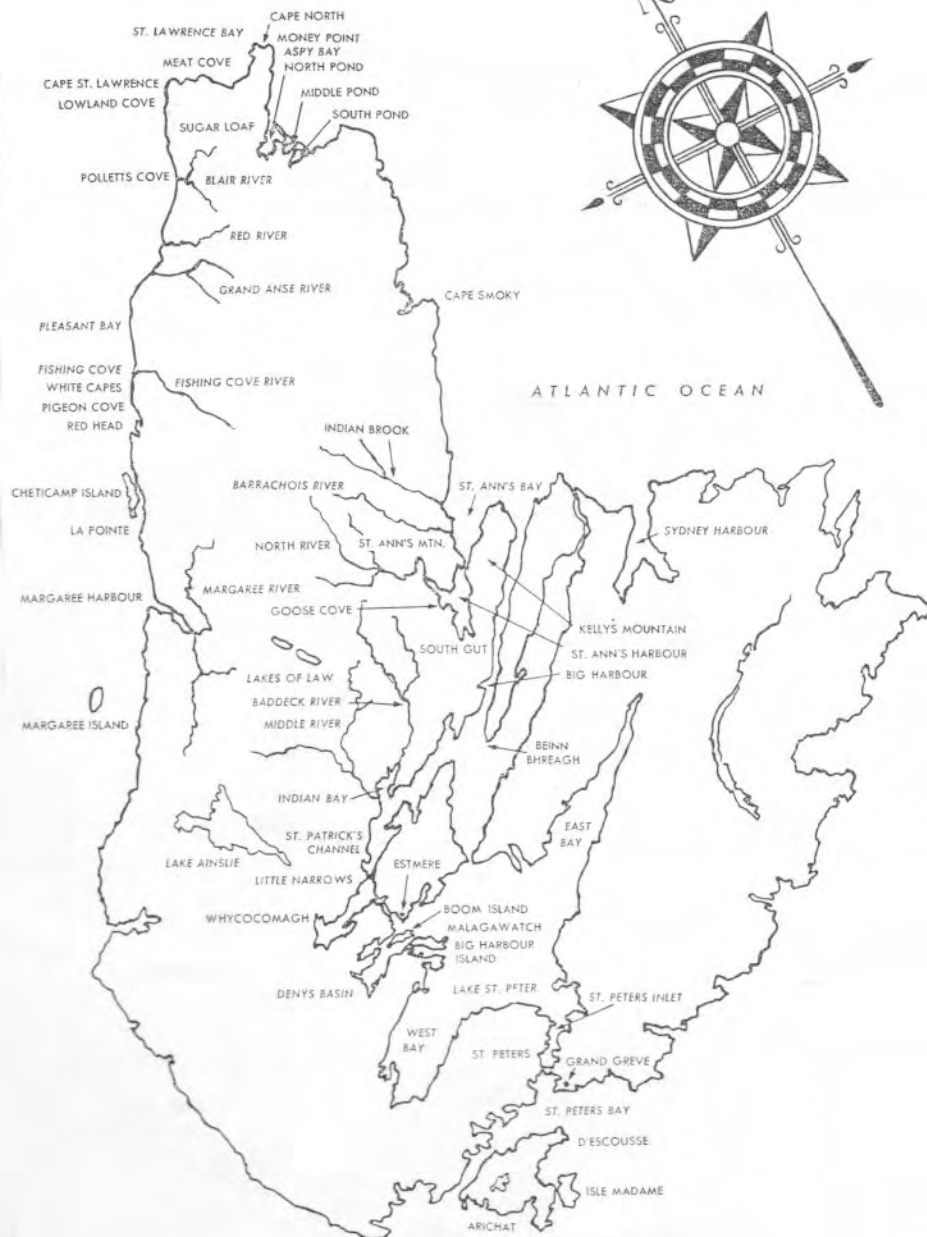
## THE DEPARTURE

*Ensign Prentice and his five companions leave Margaree Harbour in their search for help*

## THE DEPARTURE

Of S. W. Prentice, Ensign of the 84th Reg<sup>t</sup> & five others from their shipwrecked companions in the depth of winter 1781. Mr. Prentice was sent with public despatches from Gov. Haldimand at Quebec to Sir Hen<sup>r</sup> Clinton at New York, who with 18 Seamen and Passengers, were cast away on a desolate uninhabited part of the Island of Cape Breton Dec. 5: 1780. Five perished and several lost their Fingers and Toes by the severity of the cold. The Survivors continued in this place several weeks when Mr. Prentice & such as were able embarked in a small Shattered Boat to seek some inhabited country. They stopped the leaks of their Boat by pouring Water on its Bottom till the holes were closed up with Ice. During a voyage of two months they suffered incredible hardships; at length worn out with fatigue, benumbed, diseased & famished. They were discovered by some of the Native Indians. These friendly Savages afterwards went to assist those who had been left at the Wreck of whom five only were found alive & they had subsisted many Days on the Bodies of their dead companions. See Ensign Prentice's Narrative.

Painted by Rob<sup>t</sup> Smirke  
Engraved by Rob<sup>t</sup> Pollard  
London, Pub<sup>d</sup> March 8, 1784 by R. Pollard.



### CAPE BRETON ISLAND

Wrecked at Margaree the survivors of the Brigantine coasted north, rounded Cape North and followed the Atlantic Coast southward past Cape Smoky, before rescue at St. Ann's.

POPULAR After the rescue of the ST.LAWRENCE survivors referred  
NARRATIVE to above, Ensign Prenties made his way from Cape Breton  
to Halifax and there recuperated from his ordeal. He then  
resumed his voyage to New York where he finally delivered the long  
overdue dispatches of Governor Haldimand to General Sir Henry Clinton  
in August - some nine months after leaving Quebec.

From New York Ensign Prenties sailed for England and  
there he wrote his NARRATIVE OF A SHIPWRECK that was published in  
London in 1782. It was an instant success with its revelation of  
incredible fortitude and endurance of men under stress. It thrilled  
thousands of readers and ran into five editions. Indeed, more than  
two hundred years later, this remarkable Diary remains fascinating  
reading.

JOHN  
PRENTIES The career of John Thomas Prenties evinced none of the  
drama and high adventure evident in that of his brother  
Walter. He wrote no memorials, was unmentioned in military  
correspondence, was summonsed to no court martials and did not travel  
abroad. Undistinguished, he did his seven years of military service  
and then, like Walter, was retired on half-pay.

GASPE  
FISHERY In 1785, on behalf of himself and his sons, Miles Prenties  
petitioned for a large grant of land in the area of  
Gaspesia between Gaspé and Percé. There the sons, Walter  
and John established a fishery. Information concerning their activities  
in Gaspesia and subsequently at the mouth of the River Miramichi on  
Bay du Vin Island, is contained in a memorial they addressed to Governor  
Carleton on September 10th., 1790.

FINALE While their sons were busy with the Gaspesian fishery  
Miles and Elizabeth Prenties remained in Quebec City.  
Miles died in 1787 and the House of the Golden Dog was sold by his  
widow, Elizabeth, to the Freemasons of Quebec and was known thereafter  
as Freemason's Hall.

Walter Prenties died early in 1799 and was buried on  
Bay du Vin Island. Later that year, on Christmas Day, his mother,  
Elizabeth made her Will three days before her death in Quebec City.  
She was buried from the English Cathedral, Neither Walter nor John  
Prenties left known descendants.