

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE

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PART V

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Leaving Port Daniel, the Abbé J.B.A.  
Ferland and party continue visiting  
the Bay Chaleur Mission in 1836, by  
calling at Paspebiac.

KEN ANNETT

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUEPART VWESTWARD HO!

Having completed their visit to Port Daniel, the Bishop Sidyme and his party, including the Abbé Ferland, sailed on in the schooner, SARA, about noon of July 7, 1836, with the hope of a speedy voyage to Paspebiac. However, the wind died and the SARA was becalmed in fine, sunny weather. The coast of Shippigan on the New Brunswick shore could be discerned and, as dusk fell after a spectacular sunset, fires could be seen to the westward on the Point of Paspebiac. On the SARA, conversation turned to the phenomenon known as FEU DES ROUSSE - flames arising out of the sea between Caraquet, N.B. and Paspebiac. At times such flames would be small, like a "flambeau" - at other times large and spread out like a forest fire. The flames would rise and fall - advance and retire. Fishermen who tried to reach the spot where the flames appeared to be would have them disappear and then appear further on. It was claimed locally that these fires reflected the loss of a fishing boat manned by hardy seamen by the name of Roussi. When it appeared it called upon those who witnessed it to pray for the drowned crew.

PASPEBIAC POINT

In the morning of July 8th the SARA rounded the Point of Paspebiac. The travellers could see that the great Point was an equilateral triangle with its base on the forested shore. From the two extremities of the base, a mile apart, extended two sandy beaches, an arpent in width, that met a mile out into Bay Chaleur. In the interior of this sea-girt triangle was a basin or lagoon linked to the waters of the Bay by a narrow channel. At one time this basin and its entrance were deep enough to permit ships to enter. With time the basin had filled up in such a way that it no longer served as a haven for fishing craft.

The passengers and crew of the SARA noted that the Charles Robin Company had no less than eight large ships at anchor in the harbour of Paspebiac adjacent to the beach. They had arrived in the Spring with cargoes of goods from Jersey and would sail again in autumn with loads of codfish. In the interim the crews of these vessels were employed in fishing and in preparing the fish for market.

#### PASPEBIAC

Abbé Ferland recalled that sixty years ago only a few families lived at Paspebiac. Now, in 1836, the community had some six hundred souls. Some of these people had come from Plaisance in Newfoundland while others had come from the Basque country of Europe, from the Channel Island of Jersey and from the parishes of French Canada. Rumour had painted a rather unflattering picture of this group of people - it was therefore a pleasant surprise to the visitors to find them much better than they had been made out to be. While the inhabitants were certainly not such as to grace a drawing room nor compete in science and belles lettres with an Arago or a Chateaubriand, they could say, with good humour, that they excelled at fishing, hunting and in their prayers to the Bon Dieu. While appearing active and high spirited yet they were ever ready to lend one a hand. Their speech is vehement, as if they were angry, but they don't really mean it. A man will say to his neighbour, " Taise-toi ou je t'enfonce un croc dans le gau" but this must be interpreted as a compliment to an intimate friend !

#### EMMANUEL BRASSEUR

In each community visited, some individual attracted the attention of the Abbé Ferland. At Paspebiac it was Emmanuel Brasseur, the "right arm" of the missionary priest that stood out in the Abbé's memory as had the "Mother Christine" at Port Daniel. Strong, vigorous, full of life and energy Emmanuel was a noted fisherman and fearless mariner. He had many experiences at sea and loved to recount them. He told of storms survived in the family fishing boat, of fights he had won, and of the time his son's leg had been amputated by the doctor. His tales were acted out with body language as well as words. It was probably



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a comment of Emmanuel that the Abbé Ferland learned that the Acadians of Bonaventure and the folk of Paspébiac had remarkable little rapport. In living memory no one could recall a marriage between a young man of one of these communities and a young lady of the other. On both sides presumption of social caste appeared opposed to such alliances.

PETITION FOR A PRIEST      Though Paspébiac did not have a resident priest but shared a missionary with Port Daniel, Bonaventure and Cascapédia, (Rev. Father Huot at that time) there was a presbytery with a lot of ten arpents cleared for the priest's use. The congregation sought to have a resident priest to be shared with Port Daniel. Another priest would have responsibility for Bonaventure and Cascapédia. Bishop de Sidyme strongly approved such an arrangement as it would be advantageous for all the interested parties.

LAND PROBLEM      The inhabitants of Paspébiac, noted the Abbé Ferland, depend completely on the House of Robin. When the Government decided to make land grants, Charles Robin, who had absolute power at Paspébiac, told the fishermen that it would be to their advantage to limit their land grant to ten arpents as a larger grant with more cultivation would harm the fishery. They allowed themselves to be so persuaded but now, according to Abbé Ferland, repent their folly. The small lots do not allow for pasturage and the proprietors must buy everything from the company store. Goods are advanced on credit and the fishermen remain debtors always. When they seek to break their chain of debt and sell their fish elsewhere they are menaced with Court action for debt.

STORE RULES      The strict rules imposed on the Agents of the House of Robin forbid them to make advances to fishermen before a certain date. Thus, even though their warehouses may be full of provisions, not a biscuit can be distributed before the time fixed. As the fishermen are only paid in goods they cannot put anything away for the future. When they have taken all the necessities the Agents seek to balance their accounts by selling them "de luxe" items. Thus the Paspébiac girls are better dressed than many of the elegant ladies of the Quebec City suburbs !

SCHOOLING Abbé Ferland stated that schools were forbidden at Paspébiac. He quoted a directive of Philip Robin, the successor of Charles Robin, to his Agents, stating :  
 "...if they are educated will they be better fishermen ? "

SUMMER AND WINTER HOMES When Paspébiac was first settled the forest extended right down to the beaches so it was on the Point that the first homes were built. As lots were cleared it became necessary to move near the site of the cultivation. Houses were built in these forest clearings and were known as " maisons du bois" to distinguish them from the original homes on the Point, known as " maisons du baigne".

On the mainland above the base of the Point stood the residence of the Robin Company Agent - a pretty cottage half-hidden in a grove of trees. On the Point below was a vast establishment of stores, warehouses, shipyard and summer residence of the Agent during the fishing season. Here reigned admirable order. The yards of the buildings, covered with gravel, were levelled by rollers. All of the buildings were painted or white-washed. The shipyard where the Company's vessels were built had abundant supply of the finest materials.

EXPORT TRADE Paspébiac, in 1836, was the principal depot for goods destined for the various stations of the Robin Company and for the receipt of the fish destined for foreign markets. From there the Company ships loaded with Gaspesian cod sailed for the Caribbean, Brazil and the Mediterranean lands. Abbé Ferland noted that special good fortune had been with the Company's ships. Each year for more than a half-century they had left for various overseas destinations and only two had been lost in all that time. Great care had been taken to select competent captains and to employ well-built and well-equipped vessels. During the last war (i.e. the Napoleonic Wars ) all of the Robin ships had been armed and well-equipped to defend themselves from attack by enemy warships or privateers.

WESTWARD In the afternoon of July 11th the SARA set sail from Paspebiac to carry the Bishop and his party to the Mission of Bonaventure. Abbé Ferland noted that a road was open between Paspebiac and Bonaventure and that the missionary priest, Rev. Huot, had left earlier that morning for Bonaventure in the carriage of a friend. In 1836 that road was likely very primitive.

As the SARA sailed away from Paspebiac the author commented on the remarkable sea-scape as viewed from the schooner. At water level was the Point with its mass of white buildings and long line of the summer houses of the fishermen. It was a hive of activity connected with the fishery. On a higher level the coast rose regularly with its fine green carpet of fields broken here and there by groves of trees and the winter homes. In the midst of the village the Catholic Church and Protestant Chapel stood as landmarks.

The East wind had brought a welcome rain to break a long drought throughout Gaspesia.

NEW A league from the Point of Paspebiac, to the westward,  
CARLISLE the travellers could see the little town of New Carlisle. Abbé Ferland noted that the houses of New Carlisle were located at some distance from each other - he expressed the impression as that of a town walking in the countryside. The town had a Court House, Prison and was the site of the Customs Office for the North of Chaleur Bay. Lawyers and several of the notable persons of the region resided there.

The British Government had spent some £ 82,000 to establish families that remained faithful to the Motherland during the American Revolution at New Carlisle and Douglastown. "This money", said Judge John G. Thompson to Bishop Sidyme, "must have gone into digging underground tunnels because, on the surface, one can see nothing that might have caused such enormous expenditure"

The author was at pains to point out that the name, NEW CARLISLE, was indicative of a trend to displace traditional names with new names of English origin. The Indian names of Richibouctou, Nipisiguit and Tracadiggetche had been changed to New Liverpool, Bathurst and Carleton. He told how on the previous year a ship from England had arrived at Bonaventure; the Captain,

an old and experienced mariner, familiar with all the corners of the Bay Chaleur, inquired where he could find the port of Bathurst. He was astounded to learn that Bathurst was none other than the Nipisiguit to which in past years he had made many voyages.

"GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE" will resume with the Abbé Ferland's account of the visit of the Bishop and his party to the Acadian community of Bonaventure.

