

GASPE OF YESTERDAY

"TUMBLE UP, MEN, TUMBLE UP"

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The desperate call by the Mate of the ship, MARY, of Waterford, Ireland, as the vessel was driven ashore near Cape des Rosiers, Gaspesia, a total wreck.

KEN ANNETT

"TUMBLE UP, MEN, TUMBLE UP"

FOREWORD

Until the second half of the 1800's the St. Lawrence River remained one of the perils of the sea. This great waterway, highway to the great riches of the hinterland of the New World, was so ill equipped with navigational aids that in 1828 Captain Edward Boxer of H.M.S. HUSSAR reported to the First Lord of the Admiralty in London: " I found the greatest want of them (lighthouses in the St. Lawrence River and Gulf) the navigation being so very dangerous from the currents being so very strong and irregular...and there not being even one (lighthouse) in the whole Gulph.(sic) It was truly lamentable, Sir, the number of wrecks we saw on the different parts of the coast,...for the number of lives lost must be very great, and property incalculable."

Both the Gulf of the St. Lawrence and the treacherous river, made more hazardous by fog and floating ice, remained largely unlit until 1857 when Hugh Allan, then running his family's influential Montreal Ocean Steamship Company, pressured the colonial government to launch a wholesale lighthouse building program. (By then there were two lights on St. Paul Island, two on Anticosti Island and one on the north shore at Pointe des Monts, as well as the Green Island light at the mouth of the Saguenay River.) Four more important lighthouses were completed in 1857, including that of Cape des Rosiers.

Construction of the Cape des Rosiers Lighthouse had been slow and difficult. Designed by John Page, Chief Engineer of Public Works the contract for its construction was awarded to François Baby who operated steamers under contract to the government to supply lighthouses. Horses and building equipment had been brought in by sea, since the roads were dangerous and impassable in winter. When John Page went to see the building in 1856 he reported: "The work has been far more onerous and perplexing than human foresight could possibly have anticipated." The lighting and optical equipment, made in Paris were installed by French technicians who taught Canadians how to look after it. This lighthouse, with its first order catadioptric fixed white light, was one of the most powerful in Canada at that time.

The year was 1820 and the scene the seaport of Waterford, Ireland where the little ship, MARY OF WATERFORD, was about to set sail for Canada. Waterford, a city of great antiquity, lies on the bank of the River Suir above its junction with the Barrow. The harbour of Waterford is a winding and well-sheltered bay extending some fifteen miles to the sea. The locality was a stronghold of the Danes until its capture by Strongbow (Richard, Earl of Pembroke) in 1171 A.D. It was from Waterford that William of Orange sailed for England to become King after the famous Battle of the Boyne and the flight of King James II to France in 1690.

THE RORKE Aboard the ship, MARY, for the transatlantic voyage to  
BROTHERS Canada were ten passengers of whom six were sons of John and Phebe Rorke of Waterford. The Rorke brothers intended to take up land in Upper Canada. To that end they brought with them farm implements and tradesmen's tools. Their luggage also included a small library. Leavetaking must have been a solemn and emotional experience - the Rorke family being members of the Society of Friends or Quakers as they were more commonly known.

One of the brothers, Richard Rorke, would later in time write an account of his voyage and Canadian experience under the title : FORTY YEARS IN THE FOREST - Reminiscences From The Pen Of A Backwoodsman -1820-1868. As the first part of that account is of particular interest to Gaspesians here, in his own words, is his story.

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#### VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

We were now fairly started on our voyage and began to roll and pitch on the waves of the wide Atlantic. How dreary the prospect westward, how saddening the view of the land we were fast leaving for first and last time - that land and home and friends and kindred that some of us were no more to see for ever. But hope which buoys up the minds of youth and age, the anchor which stays mankind from drifting on the sand banks of despair was to be found amongst us, and though we felt serious, we did not feel unhappy. Fortunately, as it proved afterwards, there were but few passengers in company, four, with ourselves who were six in number, ten passengers, and ten seamen, including the Captain and cabin boy, were all that were on board for the voyage. The weather during the passage across the Atlantic was very favourable, a day or so of seasickness, and all was right again. Seeing but one or two ships at sea during that time, and

without any accident that would delay us a moment, and but one day and night of anything like rough weather, after passing a few icebergs as we approached America, we sighted land, St. Paul's Island, south-west of Newfoundland, in one month from the day we set sail. Thick and foggy weather prevails much in the neighborhood of the Newfoundland Banks, and we found it so, and from there to the Gulf of St. Lawrence; day after day the fog continued until we passed Anticosti Island.

About two days after we hailed a fine looking ship as she passed us, and our Captain, asking for the true bearing of Anticosti, some answer was returned which was at variance with the Captain's reckoning, but which agreed with the reckoning kept by the mate. But on we went without troubling ourselves about what we supposed would be settled somehow to the satisfaction of all concerned, and decided it was before twenty-four hours elapsed. The fog still continued and unfortunately no lookout was placed, I suppose for the reason that we saw no ice lately, and that the state of the air did not denote ice in our neighborhood.

The next day after hailing the stranger, The Orion of Boston, said to be a whaler, at about 3 p.m. I was in the galley waiting for something cooked, as biscuit had become unpleasant to my taste. The cook was present, who, by the way, was a mulatto, and a seaman as usual at the wheel, no other person on deck; we were going about five and half knots, the watch was about changing – that watch never changed in the usual manner – the cook, suddenly stepping out of the galley, for a moment looked towards the head of the ship, then turning towards the man at the helm, called out, "*Breakers ahead, Fowler, we are running ashore!*"

The steerman's name was Fowler, who was reputed as the best foremast man on board. Fowler, leaning towards the companionway, gave the word, "*Breakers ahead*"; this short sentence was scarcely uttered when the mate appeared on deck and ran forward, seized a handspike and struck the deck over the forecandle and called, "*All hands, ahoy! Tumble up, men, tumble up!*" The passengers who were at dinner, knowing that something was wrong, came fast up.

All this time I was looking for the "breakers" that were not in sight, but the sharp ear of the cook heard them and they were not far off, just a little way into that thick cloud that compassed us all round. The above was transacted in a minute or two. I knew there was a danger and prepared myself for the worst that could happen the ship; as there was no storm it did not appear to me that any lives would be lost. The mate, on assuring the sailors, returned quick to the break of the quarterdeck; the Captain in the meantime reached the deck and stood leaning, his hand on the companionway, seemingly utterly astonished, and looking ahead. The passengers had collected about the longboat on deck to be out of the way of the sailors who had run to the ropes to be ready, when the mate, turning towards the Captain, called out, "*Captain, the men are waiting for orders*"; the Captain gave such as he thought proper, and the mate, dashing his hat on the deck, rushed forward and assisted the men with all his strength. Counter orders were then given, probably finding that the vessel would not wear off shore.

Presently we saw the breakers and heard them too, a white line of foam that seemed to be bursting or tumbling over a reef miles from shore. One of my brothers now told me to keep near him; I believe he felt himself bound to take care of me to the last, for just then the unforeseen on our minds was, that if we lost the boats, it would be float or swim for it. Some attempt was made to launch the longboat, but there was no time to do so, or to get out an anchor as no anchor was made ready for soundings. The last order given as to the course of the ship was "let her drive", and under reduced canvas, we drew in to what we supposed to be a reef of rocks, but which proved to be the shore or beach. As we neared it

we saw the tops of pine trees, as it were up to the clouds, and the appearance of tall pines ever since in a fog has to me a singular and memorable appearance. This was my first introduction to an American pinery, and it was a most unpleasant meeting.

Almost immediately the word was given to "hold on", and we struck, making the ship tremble in every part from topmast to keel, again and again it was repeated, jerking and shaking her timbers; up to this time there was no confusion, but much hurry, the mate working like a lion. Soon the fore topmast shewed signs of unsteadiness and the carpenter was ordered up to cut it down - this done, over it came, striking the lee bullwarks like a dry treetop. In attempting to launch the longboat previously with the intention of washing offshore, part of a barrel of tar was spilled on the decks, both entry ports were open, and as I was passing one of the ports I slipped and had a narrow escape, from a wet jacket if nothing worse - but my jacket, and everything else about me was soon wet enough and no accident the occasion, unless we call the shipwreck an accident. We will call it a misfortune, as tender a name as we can give it.

But all this is not getting us put on shore, which for two reasons we are anxious to find ourselves, even if we can bring nothing with us, which last idea begins to wear the face of a positive fact; the first is that the land by this time appears to be the safest place for us, and that the land so near us must be some part of the American Continent, or one of the islands adjacent thereto, though not a soul on board would venture a guess of what part we were about trying to make a landing. After a time the vessel settled over to larboard; the captain gave directions to save what provisions we could, also the firearms, the latter on account of the Indians who he considered were not to be trusted. But he was much mistaken in his opinion of the character of our red brethern, at least in this generation, as some of them paid us a visit some days after we landed, the first of the aborigines that we saw, and a simple, harmless set they appeared to be, something like the European gypsies, and I have no doubt, quite as honest.

In pursuance with the last directions, two of the passengers went down into the hold where our heaviest packages were placed, taking a hatchet with them, the cargo principally salt and some boxes of Indigo; this was about half an hour after we struck. They broke open a barrel in which were two large canisters of gunpowder, one of which was caught up, about thirty-five pounds, but they had to leave immediately as the salt was sinking under their feet. In the meantime, others were busily employed bringing up on deck various articles of clothing from our berths below. It was decided that the sooner we left the wreck, the better, as it was supposed that in the first bad weather she would go to pieces. Two seamen then volunteered to lead, if possible, in the jolly-boat, taking with them a line to the shore, distant ten or twelve rods. The intention was that the passengers, or a number of them, should leave the ship from the end of the gibboom by a rope placed round the body, and so drawn or hauled ashore. I being the youngest passenger, the proposal was made to me to make the first attempt so to land.

I felt quite pleased that I should be chosen, and I readily volunteered to "walk the plank", for it looked little better as there was quite a sea on at the time, tumbling in on the beach and making an incessant noise like thunder as its waves struck the shore. The men on land could not be heard calling with all their might, nor anything like orders be heard by them from those on board. The two sailors had landed, safe, upsetting the boat but securing it to the shore. The rope being fastened round me, away I went for the gibboom, a part of the ship I had often looked at but never visited; being now under the guidance of an old salt, reached it in safety, and everything being ready, the old man shouted to me, "let go". Obeying directions, as there was nothing else for it, I dropped seven or eight feet,



and to my surprise and vexation, remained suspended until my breathing was nearly stopped. At last the knot or twist or splice, or whatever it was, was righted, and I descended into the sea at a run; those on shore hauled on the line and I was soon on terra firma, shook myself, and laid hold to assist those who should follow in like manner. I forget how many came ashore in this fashion, and all that each of us, passengers, could bring with us on so landing was a pillowslip in the hand of each filled with a change of linen for future use. Five or six with the Captain came ashore in the longboat, bringing the firearms and provisions and the Captain's property from the cabin.

We lay as we could around a large fire on shore that night; in a day or two we erected tents with the ship's sails, and on the following day were reached by a man who lived upshore about three miles from us, who gave us the information that the point of land east of us was Cape Rosier<sup>1</sup>. We kept watch in turn, and it did appear strange to be obliged to stand guard during the darkness of night for two hours at a time, watching for the appearance of wild animals, supposing that any were there that would not be more afraid of us than we could be of them, or of Indians who were too honest or too lazy to steal, even if we had anything left worth taking. But it was the Captain's orders, and we thought he must know, but how could he be acquainted with any American character, man or beast, having been employed in coasting vessels around the British Islands.

I think it was the third day after we landed, early in the morning, the weather had not yet cleared up, two of us were on the lookout, when we saw a large ship putting in for the shore with all sail set and under good way. We gave the alarm to those in the tents and called as loud as we could to warn those on board; finally seizing a musket, we fired it, this they heard, and then there was a cry and orders and running aboard in quick time. They got her round, but how they escaped the headland to the east, or the reef to the west which ran out at least two miles, was more than we could tell; no doubt the ship was embayed like ourselves by a strong current into the bay, as I have since heard stated by one who fished on the coast, that the same place is most dangerous for ships in thick weather. When the weather did clear up in a day or two after, we saw no wreck but our own, and truly our own had a lonely appearance lying before us in the surf, the entire stern driven in by the force of the sea, and a large breach made in her bows, the sea passing through and raking her at every wave. There she lay for the next storm to break her up and scatter her timbers, to join the bones of many a ship with which that beach was then lined, thrown up with all kinds of driftwood far above high watermark. Off in the distance we counted fifteen or sixteen sail, inward bound, someone said, waiting for a wind; one of them sent a boat to us, although they had to row five or six miles to ascertain who and what we were, a kind action which we took care to acknowledge when we reached Quebec; the ship was the *Industry* from Newcastle, Captain Armstrong. The boat could not land so a few lines were somehow written by one of my brothers, I believe on the blank leaf of a book, put into an empty bottle, thrown out for the boat; they picked it up, and by this means the news of our disaster reached Quebec before ourselves.

As soon as the weather moderated we boarded the wreck and saved some things belonging to us, but found that nearly all the property that was left on deck, was washed overboard, which would have been saved if it had been lashed with ropes properly, and the cargo dissolving let everything down into the hold, and we did not attempt to fish for the packages; perhaps others did after we left there, and it may be, reaped a harvest. Not being positive that insurance had been effected on the ship and cargo by the owner, it was concluded by all parties to assist in saving some of the rigging that could be got at; we went to work and removed on shore all the sails that were in anything like good condition, with the chain and hempen cables. The galley and contents were left to the tender



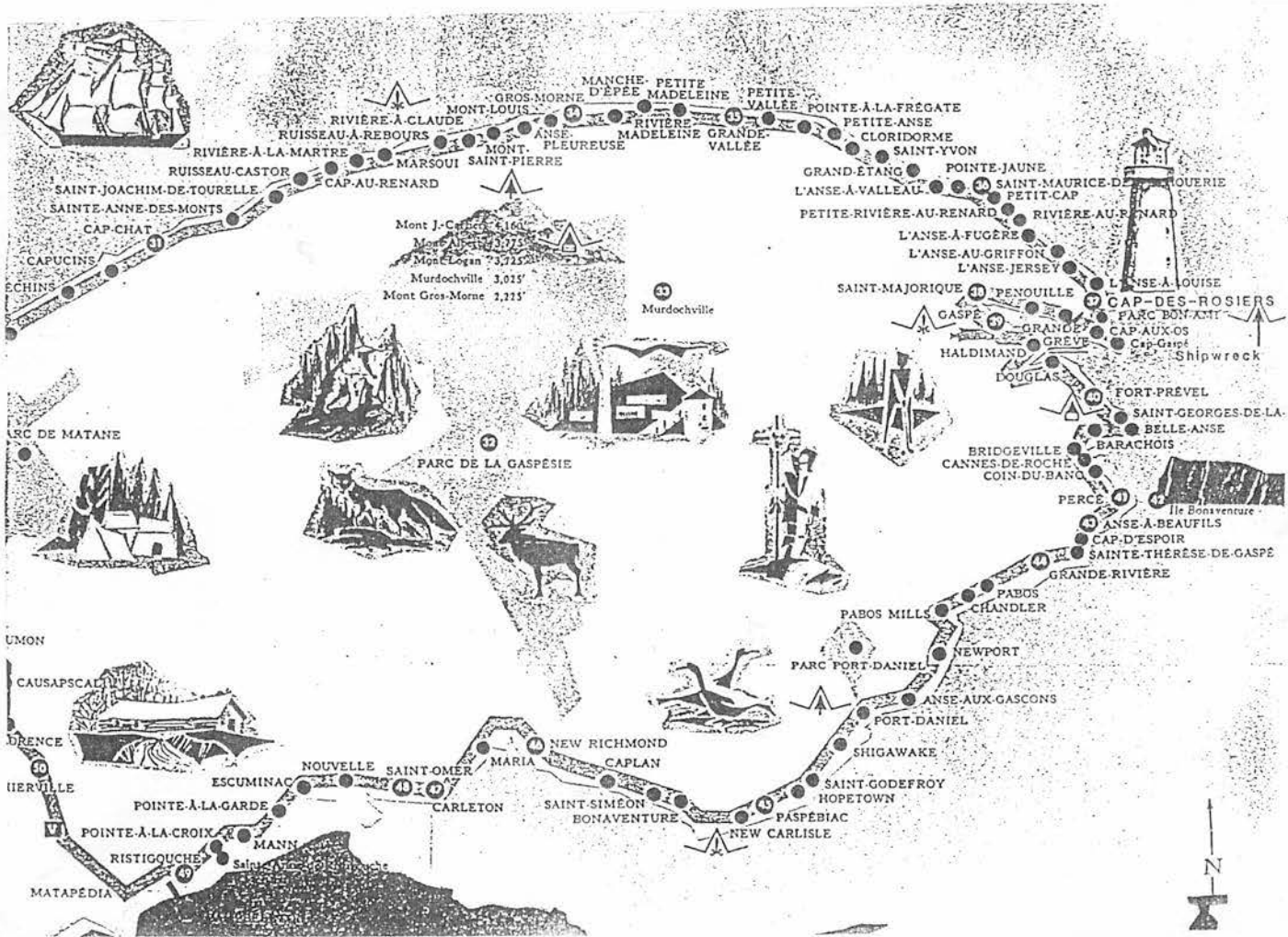
mercies of the wreckers, three families who lived up shore a few miles distant, who made out a living by wrecking and fishing, and if such windfalls came frequently in their way, they no doubt were doing a profitable business.

In the meantime the Captain and some of the passengers went across the point about eight miles to a village called Grandgrave<sup>2</sup>; our party hired a schooner then lying there to take us to Quebec, distant they said about five hundred miles. The Schooner came round in a day or two after, and the weather continuing favourable, putting what little we saved, and ourselves, on board, we set sail after a residence of eight days on the beach. On our way up the Schooner ran into Seven Islands Bay<sup>3</sup>, and it happened that some of our crew were asleep below at the time, for they took no part in working or sailing the Schooner; the anchor was let go, having a chain cable, the grating noise of which passing through the hawsehole awoke the sailors who sprang up, some of them with a short prayer on their lips, and saying they thought we were running on a reef that time.

We arrived at Quebec without further accident, and the Schooner made fast to wharf; quite a number of people came forward to see the crew and passengers of the wrecked ship, but we avoided their gaze, not wishing to be curiously questioned about our loss, and for some unexplained reason, the subject has been avoided amongst ourselves ever since it occurred. Who was to blame in the matter I cannot say, no doubt it was decided long since, but I remember it was reported to us in the fall of that year that our Captain went home as mate on some ship, and our mate went home Captain of another.

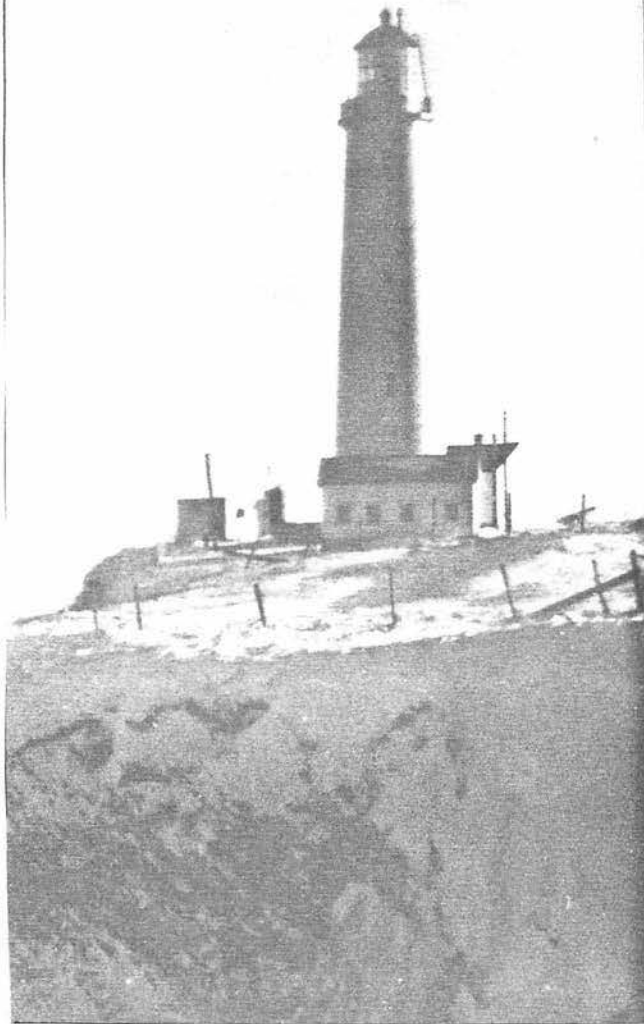
After three weeks stay in the Gibraltar of America, we left for Montreal, the weather during our stay being intensely hot, and arrived there by steamer in due time, passing through that city without stopping to Lachine where we were to meet the caravan of Durham boats<sup>4</sup>, the only conveyance for the emigrant in his passage up the St. Lawrence for Upper Canada. Entering one of these boats, in company with many other craft of the same kind, we crept slowly along shore, pushing through the small lakes on our boat for the space of ten days when we reached Prescott. Waiting here two days for the only steamer plying westward, we arrived at Toronto (York then)<sup>5</sup>. About two months delay here for the purpose of processing some title to land, which cost the Grantee the moderate sum of seventeen shillings and sixpence as the first fee or instalment for each lot, taking out the Patent at any time convenient during the next twenty-one years, we left for a new township, north-west, distant about forty-five miles<sup>6</sup>.

Then began that life of privation and toil, which at that time was pretty sure to continue for some years. That change in the habits or manner of living for which, by slow but sure steps, the unfortunate emigrant, whose destination was the forest, was prepared to encounter hardships which he or his forefathers never dreamed of. Some tales might have been told relative thereto in his native country, but singular enough, if the narrator was to tender his affidavit, for the purpose of establishing his veracity, he would not be credited by many of his hearers; he might be believed by others, but he might be sure that he would be laughed at by a majority of his hearers, in Ireland at least.



Map showing location of shipwreck off the east coast of the Gaspé where Richard Rorke lost all his belongings.





CAPE DES ROSIERS  
LIGHTHOUSE, COMPLETED  
IN 1857, THIRTY SEVEN  
YEARS AFTER THE WRECK  
OF THE "MARY OF WATER-  
FORD"

THE LIGHT EQUIPMENT,  
DEVELOPED IN FRANCE  
AND INSTALLED BY FRENCH  
TECHNICIANS INCLUDED  
THE CATADIOPTRIC LENS  
AS SHOWN BELOW

