

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE "ROCHELAIS" AT MATANE

The Matane Historian, Louis Blanchette, recalls the activities of traders from La Rochelle at Matane in the early 1600's.

KEN ANNETT

THE "ROCHELAIS" ESTABLISHMENT AT MATANE IN THE EARLY 1600's

(A free translation of the article of Louis Blanchette in the "PAYS" de Matane.)

FOREWORD

Men of La Rochelle wintered at Matane during the winter of 1615-1616. Thanks to the patient research of Louis Blanchette the presence here, at a time so long ago, is no longer in doubt. Our readers will welcome with great interest this further article of our esteemed colleague, a native son of Matane.

In the 15th and 16th centuries hundreds of mariners and fishermen from several European lands sailed the waters of the Gulf and River St. Lawrence. Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, Basques and British were drawn to the New World by the rich cod fishery and by the abundance of whales found along these distant shores. Frenchmen also came for the same reasons - Bretons, Normans and the men of La Rochelle, the "Rochelais".

About this historic period, rich in events that still remain obscure, we propose to describe the historical context existing when the Rochelais settled at the mouth of the Matane River at the beginning of the 17th century. The little community of Matane, which still has a maritime tradition, situated some 250 km to the west of Gaspé, conceals within its borders a rich but little known past.

After recalling the Rochelais presence in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the time of Jacques Cartier and explaining the context in which the merchant companies and royal commissioners of the King of France occupied the river, our short study will deal with the activity of the Rochelais, particularly at Matane, where they lived during the winter of 1615-1616.

Recall of these events of the Age of Discovery of New France will allow us to lift a small part of the veil which still obscures a host of historic facts - facts hitherto unknown but now beginning to be revealed.

THE ROCHELAISE
PRESENCE IN NEW
FRANCE.

Following the voyages of discovery of Jacques Cartier and the fruitless attempt by Roberval in 1541-1542 at colonization, France left this new and seemingly inhospitable land alone as it had hidden only too well the much sought way to fabulous China. However, the newly discovered land was frequented by fishermen, trappers and merchants who were drawn here by its natural resources that generated substantial revenue through exploitation and trade.

The Rochelais expeditions to New France had preceded the coming of Jacques Cartier. The historian, Georges Musset, states that in 1523 the Rochelais outfitted the vessel, MARIE, for a fishing expedition to the "Terres Neuves". Moreover, it is pertinent to recall that in the course of his first voyage the mariner of St. Malo (Jacques Vartier) met a Rochelais vessel in the Strait of Belle Isle on June 12, 1534. He recorded the meeting as follows:

"Etant en ce fleuve nous avisames une grande Nave qui était de La Rochelle, laquelle avait la nuit précédente passé outre le port de Brest, où ils pensaient aller pour pêcher"

The merchant firm, Georges and Macain of La Rochelle, inheritors of a long maritime and commercial tradition in New World lands, played a major part in the fishery and fur-trade of New France between the years 1590 and 1628. For these wealthy ship-owners, financiers and also brothers-in-law, -

" the fishery of the 'Terre Neuve' was both a means of employing their vessels and an opportunity to invest their capital at profit"

They participated in the fishery in three different ways: either by fitting out their own ships; or by fitting out the ships of others; or by the loan of their funds to Masters and Captains of vessels. The Rochelais merchant firms were also the major financiers of Basque expeditions to New France.

When in 1600 the post of Tadoussac was established by Pierre Chauvin, France again affirmed its presence on the banks of the River (St. Lawrence) and became a participant in the fur-trade. But France could not act alone - the capital of wealthy merchants was needed. Thus it was that Georges and Macain associated with

Pierre Chauvin and participated in several expeditions.
 [Reference to the founding of Tadoussac by Pierre Chauvin
 in the article, "TADOUSSAC", to be found in the book,
 "HUGUENOT INFLUENCE IN QUEBEC" by Ken Annett.]

In 1603 when Pierre du Gua, Sieur de Monts, was granted a fur-trade monopoly as Captain-General of New France, the Rochelais found in him a staunch ally as de Monts was a Protestant (Huguenot) as were they. His royal commission granted permission to him and his men to practise their religion in New France.

THE CANADA With the initiative of the Sieur de Monts an important
COMPANY trading company was created at Rouen in February, 1604.
 Known as the "COMPAGNIE DU CANADA" or alternatively as
 the "COMPAGNIE DE CHAMPLAIN" it had the considerable
 capital of 90,000 "livres", two fifths of which was subscribed by
 the Malouins (merchants of St.Malo) and the other three fifths in
 equal parts by the Sieur de Monts, the Rouenais and the Rochelais.
 On the day that this company was formed the Sieur de Monts named
 Samuel Georges and Jean Macain as his general and special attorneys,
 giving them full authority to act in his name and to negotiate
 agreements with the merchants of St.Jean-du-Luz and Saint-Malo. It
 was this new company that enabled de Monts to undertake the
 settlement of a colony at Port Royal in Acadia.

For their part, the Rochelais continued to outfit the Basques and to send trading expeditions to the St.Lawrence and Acadia. It was during this time that Samuel de Champlain explored the Saint Lawrence. Conflict between the administrative responsibilities that were given to Champlain and his catholic religion * became a source of embarrassment to the merchants of La Rochelle.

[* More than 300 years after the death of Champlain in Quebec City the question of his religion remains an open one. Archaeological search for his tomb made headlines in the Québec City newspapers in 1988. At that time "LE SOLEIL" wrote, in part:
 "...If the remains of the founder of Québec, a huguenot, are found, they should receive the same sumptuous treatment as given to those of Christopher Columbus..."]

In a serious effort to establish a permanent colony in New France, Champlain founded Québec in 1608. Hopes were high but the welcome was difficult. The climate was harsh and his adversaries, notably the Basques and Rochelais opposed his founding of Québec. When, in 1609, the fur-trade was opened up to all, the trading freedom that resulted created prompt and ferocious competition among the merchants and the King's commissioners. For example, Georges and Macain outfitted several vessels, including the MARIE, for the Sieur de Monts which brought back, during the summer of 1609, " a cargo of furs despite violent conflicts between their seamen and the commissioners of the Company."

Finally, in 1612, the "COMPAGNIE DU CANADA" was dissolved. The HABITATION at Québec became a storehouse for the Rochelais, Georges and Macain. And at the end of that year the King of France granted an exclusive monopoly for a period of 12 years to the Prince of Condé, including the trading territories of Québec, Tadoussac and Matane. It is from that time that research enables identification of the presence of the Rochelais at the mouth of the Matane River more clearly. Let us then situate the River Matane in this historical environment.

THE RIVER MATANE

Though research does not affirm that the Rochelais were installed at the mouth of the Matane River in the last quarter of the 16th century, it should be pointed out that the river was well known to many mariners of that time. Maps dating from the 16th century provide helpful clues as to the recognition of the Matane River by European explorers. Thus, on the Vallard Map of 1547, the place named "DUNATIN" is likely derived from the Indian name for the River Matane. It is interesting also to seek clear identity of the name "r. DILLE" on the Mercator Map of 1569 and the name "r. VILLE" on the Wytfliet Map of 1597, since both places so designated are situated geographically in the immediate vicinity of Matane. The river was sufficiently well known so as to be identified as a place suitable for the fur-trade and fishery. Evidence of this exists in the Deed that founded the Company of Sieur de Monts in December, 1603, when the King of France granted to de Monts and his associates, for a period of ten years, the exclusive privilege of the fur-trade for the lands - from "cap de Raze jusques au quarantiesme degré, comprenant

toute la coste de L'Acadie, Terre et Cap Breton, Bayes de Saint-Cler, de Chaleur, Isle persée, Gaspay, Chichedec (Sept-Isles), Mitan (Matane) Lesquemain (Les Escoumins), Tandoussas et la rivière Canada, tant d'un côté que d'autre".

When Champlain sailed up the St.Lawrence in 1603 he made only brief mention of Matane. However, in 1620, by way of contrast, he recorded the following description:

"...montant à mont l'on va jusqu'au travers de la rivière Mantanem où il y a douze à treize lieues dans cette rivière de pleine mer, des moyens vaisseaux de quatre-vingt ou cent tonneaux y peuvent entrer, c'est un havre de bare de basse mer: étant en la dite rivière assez d'eau pour tenir les vaisseaux à flot. Ce lieu est assez gentil, et s'y fait grande pescheries de saumon et truites, ayant les filets propres à cet effect, l'on en pourrait charger des bateaux en leur temps de saison."

To this confirmation by Champlain of the importance of the natural harbour at the mouth of the Matane was added the significance of the course of the river itself in providing a natural passage inland, with one short portage excepted, to the Matapedia River valley and the Bay Chaleur. Indeed, Champlain noted:

"...Cette rivière vient de certaines montagnes et peut on s'aller rendre par le travers des terres, par le moyen des canaux des sauvages, en les portant un peu par terre en la rivière (Matapedia) qui se décharge dans la baye de Chaleur..."

In concluding his description of Matane, Champlain noted:

"...ce lieu ... est fort commode pour la chasse des élans (moose) où il y en a en grande quantité."

Though this account provides some details it does not give any information on the trade in furs or on the Rochelais establishment.

THE ROCHELAIS AT MATANE

It can be assumed that at the start of the 17th century Matane was a trading post of some importance on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. The Micmac Indians of Bay Chaleur and Northern Acadia came there to trade furs with the Rochelais. The Matane Harbour and River was a frontier zone in the sense that it was on a line between the fur trade and the cod fishery. On this subject David Lee states that Matane was located at the up-river limit of the codfish resource of the St. Lawrence and that the Rochelais establishment there was oriented exclusively to the trade in furs.

In November, 1612, when King Louis XIII of France bestowed the title of "VICE-ROI DU CANADA" upon his nephew, the Prince of Condé, and granted him the monopoly of the fur trade for a period of twelve years, the Royal Edict stated authoritatively that neither "les étrangers et les pirates" were to interfere with Condé's men nor to trade with the Indians. This restriction was intended to apply to the Rochelais. But such Royal edicts in no way prevented Rochelais activity in the St. Lawrence. Thus, in the summer of 1613 an expedition led by Samuel Georges, Sr., Jean Prou, Daniel Bodier and Samuel Macain of La Rochelle and three associated merchants of Limoges, Etienne Coste and Jean and Pierre Laydeyot proceeded to trade at the Matane post.

When Champlain returned to the St. Lawrence at the end of April, 1613, he found at Matane five Malouin vessels and the Rochelais ship, "LE SOLEIL" of 150 tons with Nicolas de Vignau on board, all come to trade. It is interesting to note here that this Nicolas Vignau pretended to have discovered the North-West Passage to China and offered to guide Champlain there on a voyage of discovery. Vignau's pretence of geographical knowledge was a ruse or subterfuge intended to draw Champlain away from the St. Lawrence.

During the same summer of 1613 the ship, "LE SOLEIL" was seized by Champlain's men and its cargo of beaver skins taken. The vessel was pillaged and wrecked some fifteen leagues east of Tadoussac and the furs came into the hands of the Rouen and St. Malo merchants. In his JOURNAL, Champlain noted:- "partie des marchandises... furent sauvées et prises par les nostres qui en firent très bien leur profit avec les sauvages, qui leur causa une très bonne année.." Following upon this seizure the Rochelais brought legal action in the Privy

Council Court against the Rouen Company. The case dragged on for twenty years and was finally decided against the Rochelais.

The followin year, 1614, the Rochelais, in defiance of the orders of Champlain, outfitted and sent out the vessel "MADELEINE" to trade at Matane. The expedition was led by Georges, Macain, Prou and Picassary. But once again their vessel was seized. Still determined to continue trading the Rochelais made even more strenuous efforts and in the Spring of 1615 sent men to Matane to be on the spot in advance of the time of trading. This expedition is known from a document entitled: "CONVENTION ENTRE PLUSIEURS MARCHANDS ROCHELAIS POUR LE VOYAGE DE "JEAN" DE LA ROCHELLE À MENTANE DE LA GRANDE RIVIÈRE DU CANADA". A study of this notarial document was made by Robert Le Blant and Marcel Delafosse entitled: "LES ROCHELAIS DANS LA VALLEE DU SAINT-LAURENT 1599-1618".

This 1615 expedition involving "wintering" at Matane proved to be most successful. When on June 1, 1616, the vessel "JEAN", with Daniel Baignault as Master, reached Matane from La Rochelle to embark the "winterers" led by Gabriel Pincaudeau, there was not only furs from winter trade to be loaded but furs that had been owing by the Indians. Historian Marcel Trudel pretends however that this "wintering" of 1615-1616 at Matane was purely accidental and that the Rochelais were there only that winter, adding: "et encore n'était-ce que par des contrebandiers venus de La Rochelle".

In any event the Rochelais continued for more than a decade to return to the St. Lawrence and to use Matane for trade. Drawn here by a desire for gain, rather than any intention to colonize, these Rochelais, powerful, rich and well-equipped, remained formidable adversaries of Champlain. The writings of Champlain in his VOYAGES refer on various occasions to the presence of these adversaries who, in his words: "... désobéissent aux commandemens de sa Majesté." and again, "... Telles personnes méritaient estre chastiez sévèrement, pour enfreindre les Ordonnances: mais quoy, dit on, sont Rochelais, c'est à dire très mauvais et désobéissans subjects."

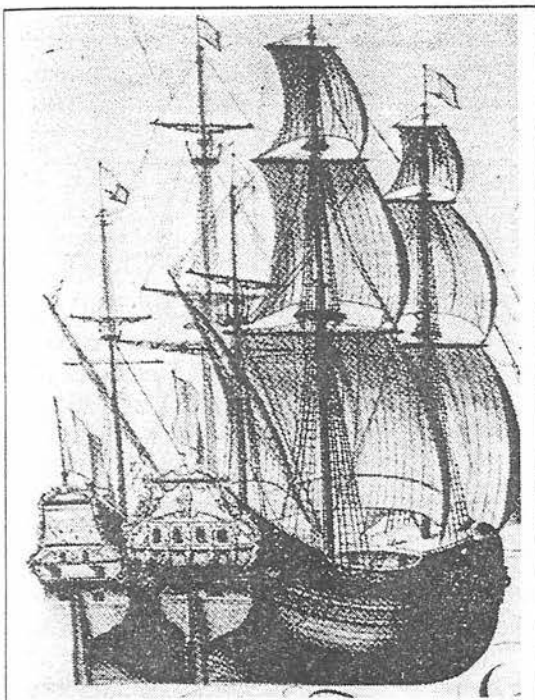
In this account we have the impression of having only touched lightly on the history of a fascinating period, that of the age of discovery of New France.

The presence of the Rochelais on the St.Lawrence and in Acadia remains much more complex and important than this text conveys. The Rochelais, and particularly Georges and Macain were at the very heart of an important conflict with Champlain over natural resources and the colonization of New France. It will be interesting to study this whole question and to evaluate fully the participation and collobaration of the Rochelair in the projects of de Monts and Poutrincourt in Acadia.

In addition, such research would assist greatly in understanding the history of early settlement and occupation of the north and south shores of the River and Gulf of St.Lawrence in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In closing we hope that this paper on the establishment of the Rochelais at Matane will contribute to a study of this early time and assist in the appreciation of the rich maritime heritage of localities along the shores of the St.Lawrence.

Louis Blanchette



Voilier typique utilisé par les marchands de La Rochelle au début du 17e siècle. Nous pouvons présumer que de tels vaisseaux aient mouillé à plusieurs reprises en face de Matane.

EVENTS IN The events described above at Gaspé, Matane, Tadoussac,
CONTEXT Québec and elsewhere along the Gulf and River St. Lawrence
 in the 16th and early 17th centuries were related to the
 situation prevailing in the countries of Western Europe at that time.
 It was the Age of the Reformation when the new doctrines of Martin
 Luther and John Calvin caused both theological and military strife
 between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The following extract from
 "HUGUENOT INFLUENCE IN QUEBEC" by Ken Annett attempts to put in context
 these historic, European events.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO "HUGUENOT INFLUENCE IN QUEBEC". KEN ANNETT

The origin of the Huguenots or Protestants of France is to be found in the religious reform movement of 16th century Europe. In France, as early as 1512, the reform doctrine was enunciated by Jacobus Faber and found support and encouragement in the spread of Martin Luther's teachings. Swift and drastic reaction to what was regarded as dangerous heresy came from the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as 1525 French religious reformers were condemned by the Catholic Courts and executed by burning at the stake. In thus providing the reform movement with early martyrs the Catholic Church authorities set the stage for a long and bitter struggle with the Huguenots.

For a time the French State did not intervene in the growing polarization of its Roman Catholic and Huguenot citizens but in 1535 King Francis I, at the urging of the Catholics, issued a formal Edict ordering extermination of Huguenot heresy. Among the many who fled from France as a result of this Edict was the religious reformer, John Calvin. From refuge in Switzerland Calvin published his influential "INSTITUTES" which provided Huguenots with patterns of religious organization, faith and discipline that strengthened Protestant churches in France and enabled the Huguenots to survive successive persecutions.

Religious strife was carried deeper into the domain of national politics in the reign of King Henry II, son of Francis I. A weak ruler, Henry II was dominated, in turn, by his wife, Catherine de'Medici, his mistress, Diane de Poitiers and the influential Duke de Montmorency. Henry II persecuted the Huguenots through financial extortion and by trial and execution before the notorious "CHAMBRE ARDENTE".

The successors of Henry II to the throne of France, his brothers Francis II, Charles IX and Henry III were all weak kings and unable to resolve the religious conflict within France. In the reign of Charles IX the Huguenot cause found an exceptionally able and distinguished leader in Count Gaspard de Chatillon, Admiral Coligny who was able to check for a time the nefarious influence of the Catholic party led by the De Guise family. Alarmed by the growing influence of Coligny and the Huguenots, the devious Queen-Mother, Catherine de'Medici, plotted and perpetrated the infamous MASSACRE OF ST.BARTHOLOMEW in 1572 during which Coligny and leading Huguenots were murdered.

There followed a convoluted and destructive period of civil war that rocked France until the death of Henry III and the accession to the throne of a strong King in the person of Henry IV.

With a background of Protestant education and military service under the great Huguenot leader, Coligny, the aim of King Henry IV was to consolidate his position as the undisputed ruler of France and restore peace and prosperity to his kingdom. To that end he issued in 1598 the Edict of Nantes by which the Huguenots were granted religious toleration and cessation of State persecution. With the support of his exceptionally wise and capable chief minister, the Huguenot Duke de Sully, France entered upon a remarkable period of reform and progress.

As the 16th century came to a close the policies of King Henry IV and Sully were responsible for a new era in France. A veritable outburst of interest and activity for overseas expansion and trade occurred in Maritime France.

Such interest, leadership and financial from the established Huguenot seaports from Rouen to La Rochelle is reflected in the Louis Blanchette study above.



1609 MAP OF THE ST. LAWRENCE AND ACADIA
MARC LESCARBOT