

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

A LINK BETWEEN GASPÉ AND MIRAMICHI  
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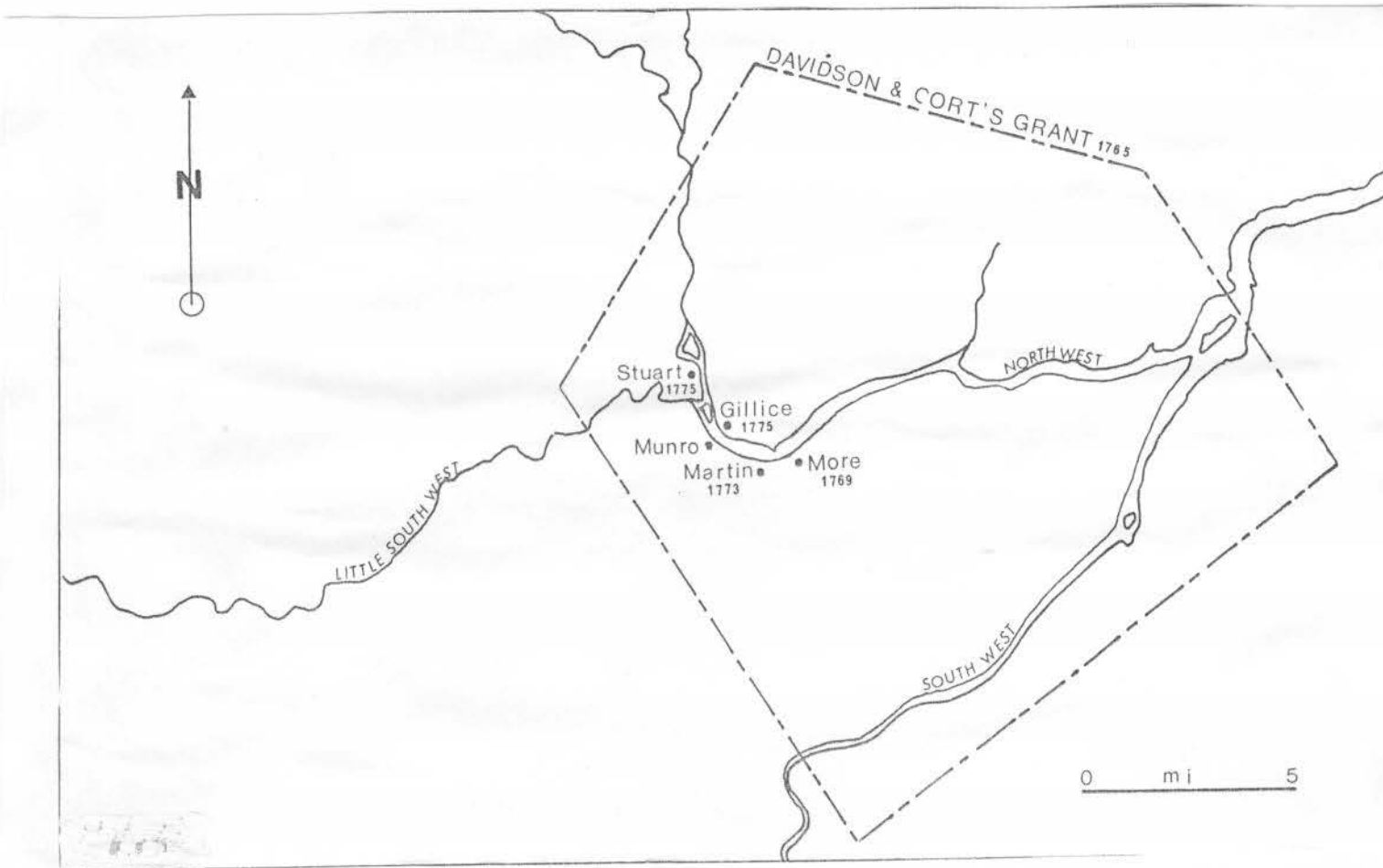
Recalling the settlement on the Miramichi by William Davidson and John Cort and how Mary Anna Cort of Miramichi became a member of the O'Hara family of Gaspé Basin.

KEN ANNETT

A LINK BETWEEN GASPE AND MIRAMICHI

MIRAMICHI  
GRANT TO  
DAVIDSON  
AND CORT

In 1765, at the time when Felix O'Hara was making a new home for his family in Gaspé Basin, two Scots, William Davidson of Inverness and John Cort of Aberdeen acquired a grant of 100,000 acres on the Miramichi River, as sketched below:



Davidson and Cort who had experience with salmon fishery in Scotland proposed to establish such a fishery on the Miramichi. They had not requested so large a grant of land but the government thought there might be difficulties if the fishing rights were granted to one party and the lands to another. In 1765 there were Micmac Indians on the North West and Little South West Miramichi but no other settlers with the bounds of the lands granted to Davidson and Cort.

Acadian refugees who had fled to the Miramichi in the 1750's after deportation from Nova Scotia had been removed by the expedition of Colonel James Murray in 1758 at the time of the Gaspé operation of General James Wolfe. In the Spring of 1766 Davidson and Cort brought some twenty to thirty men to the Miramichi. Some were Scots from Moray Firth but most were colonists from New Hampshire and Vermont. They came in two schooners of 130 and 70 tons respectively and set to work in developing the salmon fishery.

IMPACT OF AMERICAN REVOLUTION During the first few years the fishery flourished despite hardships imposed by the wilderness, the isolation and misfortunes experienced in obtaining salt needed as a preservative for the fish. Furs were exported as well as fish and a local shipyard launched a 300 ton schooner in 1773. But with the outbreak of the War of the American Revolution the Miramichi, in common with Gaspesia, suffered raiding by American privateers. (Ref.- GASPE OF YESTERDAY, #045, THE COX PAPERS). In 1777 the raids of these privateers combined with Indian hostility was so severe that most of the settlers on the Miramichi left in November of that year.

RETURN TO MIRAMICHI Upon the restoration of peace in 1783 settlement resumed on the Davidson-Cort lands in Miramichi. The following MINUTES OF AN INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF DAVIDSON AND CORT GRANT, 1785 provides insight into the state of settlement two years after the end of the war.

## MINUTES OF AN INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF DAVIDSON &amp; CORT'S GRANT, 1785.

Names of Settlers,	Time when Settled,	Family or Single,	No. of Acres Improved.	By whom Settled and on what Branch of the River.
John Stuart	May, 1775,	5 in family	15 acres in excellent cultivation	N. W. River — Mr. Davidson.
Angus Gillis	Sept. 1775,	6 do	9 acres do	do do
Donald Monro	do	Single	1 1/2 do Clear	do do
Willm. Martin	Nov. 1773,	4 in family	10 do under good cultivation	do do
James Welsh	July, 1784,	3 do	1 1/2 do do	do do
Daniel Dunn	July, 1785	do	Beginning to Improve	do do
James Barnett	June, 1784,	Single	2 acres clear	do do
Willm. More	June, 1769,	4 in family	1 do	do do
John Bigg	Nov. 1784,	2 do		do do
Robt. Cram	June, 1785,	9 do	1 acre clear	do do
Mr. Wm. Davidson	1785,		Erecting a Saw Mill	do do
Benj. Stimmeist	May, 1784,	5 in family	3 acres under proper cultivation	do Mr. Cort.
Peter Bonamy	do	9 do	1 acre clear	do do
Jonathan Loughberry	do	Single	1/2 do	do do
James McComb	Dec., 1784,	do	2 do clear	do Mr. Davidson.
Joseph Bigg	Aug., 1784,	3 in family	1 do	do do
James Anderson	do	5 do	3/4 do	do do
James McCullum	June, 1785,		1 1/2 acres fenced and drained	do Mr. Cort.
18 families		62 Souls	50 3/4 acres	

The date of death of John Cort can be established only by inference. Historian Esther Clark Wright states in her book on the Miramichi that William Davidson died in June, 1790 and that "his partner, John Cort, had died many years previously". It would appear that Cort's death may have been about 1785 or somewhat previously. What is known is that John Cort's daughter, Mary Anna Cort, was adopted by the Felix O'Hara family of Gaspé and that she eventually married Hugh O'Hara, son of Felix and Martha O'Hara. Reference to the life and tragic death of Hugh O'Hara in 1818 can be found in the GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY article #020 - "THE O'HARA FAMILY OF GASPÉ" published by SPEC on June 21, 1983.

The year after her husband's death the Widow Mary Anna Cort O'Hara made claim before the Gaspé Land Commission meeting at Douglastown for grant of lands on her behalf and on that of her children, Felix, Edward, Jane, Hugh, Martha, Brian and Maria O'Hara.

TO It is permissible to speculate, across the span of two  
SPECULATE centuries as to how the youthful Mary Anna Cort travelled  
 from the Miramichi to Gaspé Basin and her adoptive family  
 of O'Hara. It is known that a Royal Navy frigate, H.M.S.VIPER, Capt.  
 Boyle,R.N., Commander was active in both Gaspesian and Miramichi waters  
 against American privateers during the Revolutionary War. It is an  
 open question if Capt. Boyle,R.N. was related to the Major or Mr.  
 James Boyle, pioneer settler on the South West Arm of Gaspé Bay. But  
 H.M.S. VIPER would have been in Gaspé Harbour on occasion and Capt.  
 Boyle,R.N. would have known Felix O'Hara, the most prominent citizen  
 of Gaspé. Perhaps it was on H.M.S.VIPER that Mary Anna Cort travelled  
 from Miramichi to Gaspé.

REMEMBRANCE The following reference to Mary Anna Cort O'Hara is  
 found in the remarkable monograph, REMEMBRANCE, by  
 Edith Arnold Mills. "...The O'Hara family (my father's first wife  
 was Miss O'Hara) was a very old aristocratic one and they were  
 exceedingly proud of their lineage and consequently exclusive. Mrs  
 Hugh O'Hara was an aristocrat and it is within my recollection that  
 a legacy came to each of my (step) sisters from the "Duff" family  
 when Lady Ann Duff died. Duff is the family name of the Earl of Fife.  
 One of King Edward VII's daughters married a Duke of Fife. Mrs.O'Hara  
 was kin to Lady Ann Duff and my (step) sisters received their legacies  
 through Mrs.Hugh O'Hara who was their grandmother. She had two daughters,  
 one (Jane) Mrs.McConnell, whose husband was Collector of Customs, and  
 my father, who married the other.(Maria) They had four daughters,all  
 born in Gaspé. He built a stone house, probably the only one of that  
 material in the place at that time. It was hardly completed when orders  
 came from the Bishop for a removal of my father to St.Johns, Quebec, to  
 be chaplain to the Forces and to serve other churches as well. One was

REMEMBRANCE at Longueil in 1839. While at St.Johns his wife died  
 (ctd) leaving him with four little girls. Mrs.Hugh O'Hara  
 still lived in Gaspé and it was his wish that the children be near  
 their grandmother, so an application was made to the Bishop for  
 permission to return to his old duties. Leave was obtained and he  
 returned to Gaspé...."

FAMILY Mary Anna Cort O'Hara had to contend with shattering family  
LOSS loss. In 1818 she was widowed by the tragic loss of her  
 husband, Major Hugh O'Hara, who contracted fever in caring  
 for sick passengers on an emigrant ship and died. In 1824 she had  
 the sorrowful news that her son, Felix, a Lieutenant in the Army,  
 had died in Ceylon. In 1825 her daughter, Martha, twenty years of  
 age, passed away- her death being attributed to the news of the  
 death of her brother, Felix. To these sad blows was added the death  
 of her daughter, Maria, wife of the Rev. William Arnold, as mentioned  
 above, and subsequent responsibility for her grand-daughters, Emily  
 Maria, Julia Louisa, Margaret Catherine and Jane May Arnold.

CHURCH A Deed Of Donation that the Widow Mary Anna Court signed in  
LAND 1840 reflects a lady in full charge of her life and with  
DONOR very definite ideas. This Deed, drawn up by John D. McConnell,  
 Justice of the Peace, donated to the Right Reverend Father in  
 God, George Jehosophat Mountain, Lord Bishop of Montreal and then  
 administering the vacant Diocese of Quebec, the following:

"...all that piece or parcel of land lying and being upon the North  
 side of the South West Arm of Gaspé Bay, forming a part or parcel of  
 the Lot commonly called Number Four, upon which a graveyard has  
 already been marked out or partly enclosed, containing one half acre  
 of land..." The precise limits of this donated land were specified  
 "...according to a survey made lately by Henry O'Hara, Esq."

CHURCH  
LAND  
DONOR

(ctd)

The Deed stated the purpose and intent of the donation as follows: "...Whereas the Faith of the United Church of Great Britain and Ireland, commonly called the Protestant Episcopal Church, is professed by the majority of the Inhabitants in the neighbourhood of Gaspé Basin and the said Mary Ann Cort, alias Mary Ann O'Hara, Widow, being anxious to promote the Glory of God by founding a place of public worship for the use of the Protestant Episcopal Inhabitants, Hath agreed and doth hereby agree...First of all for the erection of a Church...where Divine Worship is to be celebrated duly according to the rites of the United Church of Great Britain and Ireland...Secondly, that the aforesaid Mary Ann Cort shall be entitled to make the first choice of a pew therein for herself, her Heirs and Assigns, forever. Thirdly that the said piece of land shall be regularly inclosed with a substantial fence by the Inhabitants and that no person shall be buried in the graveyard except by the officiating Minister of the Protestant Church, or by, in his absence from this part of the Mission, a person duly authorized to read the Order of the Dead as used in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England..."

The Deed bears the signatures of MARIA ANNA CORT; REV. EDWARD CUSACK; JOHN D. McCONNELL, J.P.; and as WITNESSES - JULIA COLLAS AND CHARLES MORRIS, MISSIONARY.

Among the Deeds held by the Percé Notarial Archives are others signed by the Widow Mary Anna Cort O'Hara. These include an 1846 SALE TO THE SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF GASPE BAY; an 1851 DONATION TO BISHOP GEORGE J. MOUNTAIN and an 1856 BARGAIN AND SALE FROM PETER CHOUINARD TO MARY ANN O'HARA.

POSTSCRIPT Had Mary Anna Cort O'Hara kept a Diary or had the time and inclination to write down her life story what a treasure such an account would be to those of today who seek to understand and recount the early years in Gaspé. If one had access to her "REMEMBRANCE" of her family in Miramichi and the stories she may have heard of Cort connections back in Scotland, of the circumstances that made her an orphan and of her adoption by the O'Hara family of Gaspé Basin, of her marriage to Hugh O'Hara and the birth of their children, of the shattering loss of loved ones. Such "REMEMBRANCE" could help to answer those unanswered and nagging questions about the O'Hara and Stewart families in particular and of other pioneer Gaspé Bay families who would have been well known to her.

Like many another Gaspesian Widow she dried her tears, faced the future resolutely and was a tower of strength to her family. May she rest in peace.