

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

WILLIAM H. CLAPPERTON

1839 - 1922

Merchant-Trader, Member for the
County of Bonaventure in the
Quebec Legislative Assembly, and
Crown Lands Agent for Bonaventure
from 1905 until 1922.

KEN ANNETT

WILLIAM H. CLAPPERTON

PREFACE In the 264th article of the "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" series, "HONOURABLE MEMBERS FOR GASPEZIA FOR THE PAST 200 YEARS", the names and terms of service of members of both the Provincial and Federal Legislatures for Gaspé and Bonaventure were recalled. In the Quebec election of 1897 the electors of Bonaventure County chose as their representative William H. Clapperton, a native son. Born in Carleton and then resident in Maria, he served as their member of the Legislative Assembly of Quebec until November, 1904. He was well and widely known in all the communities of his large riding.

Some forty years following his death in 1922 one of his sons, George Clapperton, wrote a memoir recalling his father's remarkable career. "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" acknowledges its debt to that memoir in presenting this review of the life of a distinguished Gaspeian, William H. Clapperton.

FAMILY The Clapperton family, of Scottish origin, had long
ORIGINS claimed as home the community of Fochabers located on the river Spey in the District of Moray. Roman Catholic in faith the family had, over time, given sons and daughters to their Church as priests and nuns. Margaret Clapperton, as Sister Teresa, had a part in the founding of the first Ursuline Convent in Scotland at Edinburgh in 1833.

TO In or about 1830 John Clapperton of Fochabers left his
CANADA native Scotland to seek a new life in Canada. At Halifax, Nova Scotia, he found employment as a mariner in the coastal trade. He acquired his own vessel and used it to engage in trading

in the ports of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Bay Chaleur. Evidently he did more than trade, for in Bay Chaleur he met and married Félicité Dugas, daughter of Captain Hilarion Dugas of Maria, and established his home at Carleton. In the autumn of 1838, on the short sea voyage from Carleton to Dalhousie, N.B., Captain John Clapperton was tragically drowned, leaving his young widow, Félicité, with their two sons, John, age two years and William, age nine months.

BOYHOOD

EDUCATION

Faced with the harsh reality of providing for her young sons, the Widow Félicité Clapperton found work as a seamstress in Dalhousie, N.B. and made her home there. She was evidently in touch with the Clapperton family in Scotland for when her sons reached school age her Scottish father-in-law offered to keep his grandsons and provide for their education in Scotland. Having agreed, Félicité travelled with her sons to Fochabers and left them in the care of the grandfather. When they had completed their schooling she again travelled from Dalhousie to Scotland to accompany them on the trans-ocean trip back to Bay Chaleur. Family tradition holds that after Félicité and her sons disembarked at Bathurst to visit friends, the vessel on which they had travelled from Scotland was lost with all its passengers destined for Dalhousie.

EARLY

EMPLOY

Following their return to Gaspesia from schooling in Scotland James and William Clapperton found employment with Mr. John Meagher at Carleton and remained there for several years before starting business on their own. The following notes on John Meagher are drawn from "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" #103 - "JOSEPH MEAGHER - INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS FOR GASPEZIA -1855-1865"

"The Meagher family of Carleton in Gaspesia was of Irish, Roman Catholic origin and had

"been resident in Halifax, N.S. prior to settlement on the Gaspé Coast in the 1830's. John Meagher, the brother of Joseph, had been active in the Labrador Fishery for some years before locating on the shores of Carleton harbour. He became well-known and wealthy as a merchant-trader and in 1854 was elected to represent Bonaventure County in the Legislative Assembly of Quebec where he served until 1861.."

After his period of employment with John Meagher, James Clapperton opened his own General Store at Bonaventure. In time he sold his store and moved far from Gaspesia to Stillwater, Minnesota, where he was active in the lumber industry. His choice of Stillwater may be explained from the following extract from the "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" article #162 published by SPEC on 19 July 1988:
TOZER FAMILY NOTES -

"...DAVID (Tozer) was still attending school at South Esk (n.B.) in 1834, but he spent his teenage and early manhood years with his parents in the Gaspé. In 1856 he moved to Stillwater, Minnesota, where he built up a lumber empire on the St.Croix River, became widely known as "Tozer the Lumber King" and died a millionaire in 1905.."

WILLIAM
CLAPPERTON

The younger son, William Clapperton, having served an apprenticeship with the Meagher business, settled at Maria and proceeded to build his own business in the processing and export of salt fish, particularly Bay Chaleur herring on a large scale. After careful preparation the herring were packed

in cedar barrels of 200 pounds. Annual production ran to 4000 / 5000 barrels, creating a significant subsidiary industry of barrel-making. In addition to this fishery and the operation of a large general store, William Clapperton bought and exported significant amounts of hardwood to the Caribbean islands where it was used in the making of puncheons for molasses. The export of fish and timber and the import of trade goods meant the arrival and departure in season of many schooners and other coastal craft in Bay Chaleur.

MARRIAGE In 1866 William H. Clapperton married Mary-Ann Lebel, daughter of the Notary Jos. G. Lebel and his wife, Maria Meagher. A native of Kamouraska. Notary Lebel had settled at Carleton where his daughter, Mary-Ann had been born. Later Lebel moved to New Carlisle where he served as Registrar of the County. It was there that the marriage of William Clapperton and Mary-Ann Lebel was celebrated.

Five sons, Henry, John, Thomas, Charles and George and three daughters, Thérèse, Susan and Amélia comprised the family of William and Mary-Ann Clapperton. The Widow Félicité Dugas Clapperton was also a member of the family until her death in 1897 in her 93rd year.

THE Though Bonaventure County had, over time, been the
POLITICAL scene of stirring electoral campaigns there was a
SCENE long tradition of Liberal party members. In 1897
the Liberal member of the Quebec Legislative
Assembly, the noted lawyer, Francois-Xavier Lemieux, resigned
to become a Judge. A Liberal convention held at New Carlisle chose
William H. Clapperton as candidate and he was elected by the voters
of Bonaventure County with a large majority . He was re-elected in

the general provincial election of 1900. However, in the election of 1904 he was opposed and defeated at the polls by the rising young New Carlisle lawyer, John Hall Kelly.

William Clapperton retired from the political arena in 1905 to become the Crown Lands Agent for Bonaventure West. He held that post until his death in 1922 in his 84th year. His wife, Mary-Ann survived to die at the home of her son, Thomas, at Grand Cascapedia in 1936 in her 98th year.

One finds an echo in the memoir of his son of an earlier age when a citizen, chosen by his peers to represent them in public affairs, would return to his community and home hearth and find satisfaction in humbler pursuits. Thus George Clapperton could write of her father:

"...Il avait su profiter des leçons de colture qu'il avait reçues en Ecosse et c'est ainsi qu'avec peu de terre arable il parvenait à produire suffisamment de fourrage pour garder un cheval, deux ou trois vaches, des moutons, etc. Il était aussi très bon jardinier et nous ne manquions jamais de légumes à la maison..."