

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUE

PART VI

Continuing the account of the
Abbé J.B.A.Ferland of a visit
in 1836 to the Bay Chaleur by
Bishop Sidyme. From Paspébiac
the schooner SARA sailed for
the settlement at Bonaventure.

KEN ANNETT

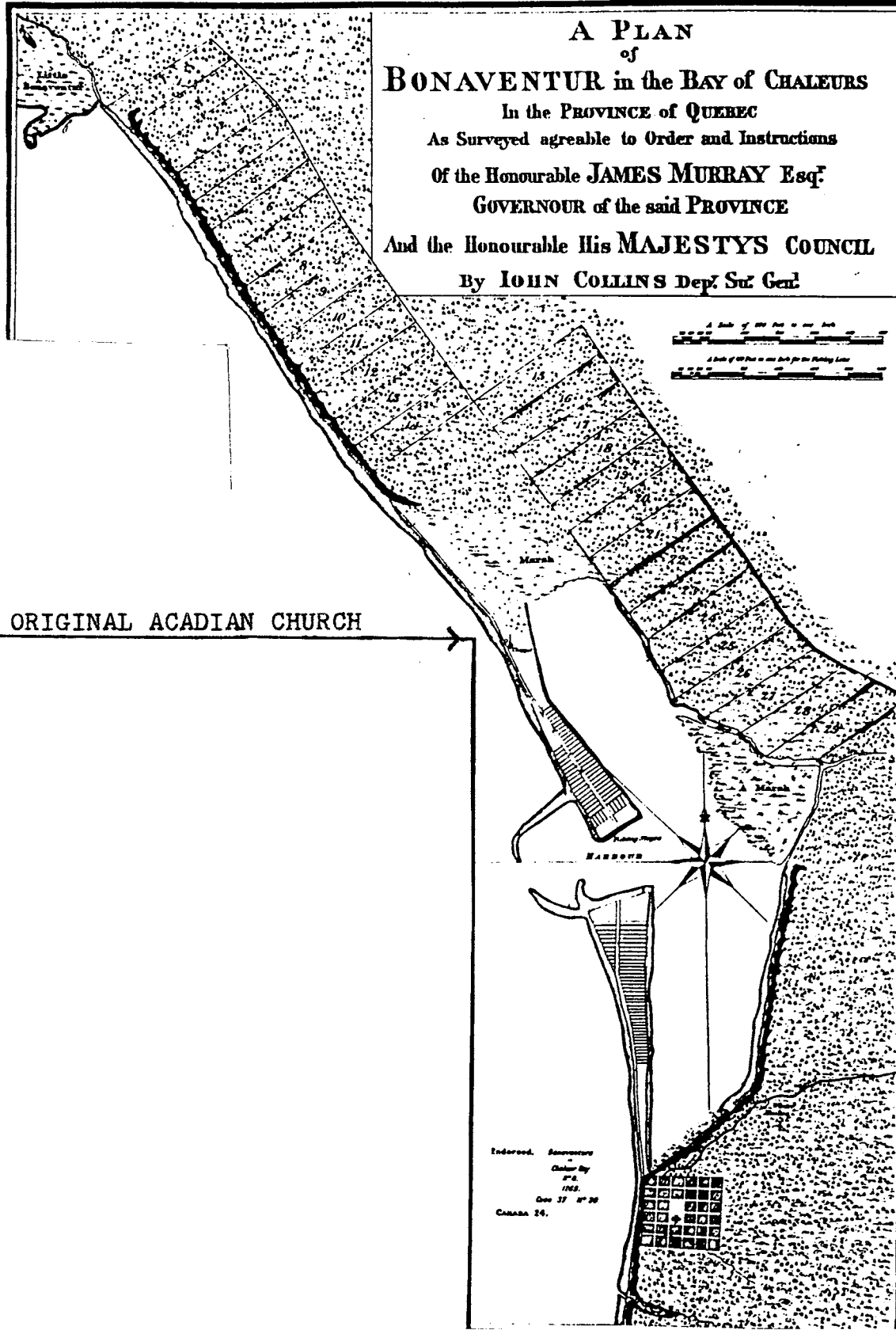
GASPESIAN TRAVELOGUEPART VITO BONAVENTURE

Upon rounding Bonaventure Point the Bishop's party on the schooner SARA saw a flag-bedecked fishing boat approaching. It carried prominent citizens of Bonaventure village and members of the local militia who came armed with muskets to fire an official salute of welcome. This local delegation, having come on board of the schooner SARA, advised her Captain that entrance to the sheltered harbour at the mouth of the Bonaventure River was possible for a vessel such as SARA only at high tide. The entrance channel was tortuous and hard to navigate without grounding. They invited the Bishop and his party to come ashore with them in their fishing boat. Thus landing was made near the Point at the mouth of the river.

Bonaventure's church building was located about a mile from the place of landing at the West end of the narrow tongue of land between the Bay Chaleur and the Barachois. (Ref. "GASPE OF YESTERDAY" #169 ROUSSEAU AT BONAVENTURE) While not distinguished by its architecture the church was remarkable for its neat and tidy appearance. Behind the church stood the "presbytère" or rectory, the principal dwelling of Rev. Father Huot whose Mission included Port Daniel, Paspébiac, Bonaventure and Caspédiac. Bonaventure was eight leagues from Port Daniel, four leagues from Paspébiac and six leagues from Caspédiac .

ON THE ACADIANS

The Acadians of Bonaventure impressed the Abbé Ferland as a pleasant, intelligent people. Their missionary priest observed that their character and customs reflected their background. Elementary schooling, general among them for some time, had produced the most satisfactory results. Abbé Ferland noted that in the two or three settlements of the District of Gaspé where schools had been established the inhabitants attend to their civic and religious duties better than their neighbours in communities deprived of schooling.



It was in 1762, noted the Abbé Ferland, that thirteen Acadian families, harried for the past two years by English authorities and forced to live in the woods with the Indians, decided to settle on the banks of the River Bonaventure. (Ref. "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" #55, BONAVENTURE) The first settlers and their offspring were occupied mainly in clearing the land and in agriculture - they engaged in fishing only to meet their needs. The Quebec Government procrastinated in granting title to the lands they settled. Thirty years later, in 1792, they still had not received their land patents and complained that the farms that they had cleared and improved were being granted to others. (Ref. "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" 1. #111 GOVERNOR'S WARRANTS FOR LANDS IN GASPEZIA. 2. #133 LOUIS BOURDAGES.

Generally the Acadians lived to a ripe old age and left numerous descendants. The POIRIER family, long established in Bonaventure, comprised several hundred members. An aged patriarch, M. Forêt, the ancestor of several inhabitants of Bonaventure, has recently died leaving three hundred and eighteen descendants.

RECALLING THE ACADIAN DISPERSION.

The Bishop and his party were reminded at Bonaventure of those families that had formerly, in peaceful occupation, enjoyed their farms and homesteads in Acadia. (Nova Scotia) Their religious faith and customs reflected an era of Christianity when life was more simple and primitive. When dispersed far and wide within North America and beyond, the Acadian exiles had maintained religiously the memory of better times. Nor had the Gaspesian Acadians forgotten the circumstances of the expulsion of their ancestors from their homes in Acadia. These unfortunate victims, who believed that they were under the protection of British Law, had been removed from their homes and forced at bayonet point to board British ships under orders to carry them into exile. Husband was separated from wife, brother from brother, children from parents. Some were lost in storm at sea, some carried to Europe and many exiled to American colonies. Acadia had remained deprived of inhabitants until new colonists of British origin had arrived to take over the lands, homes and stock of the unfortunate exiles. The expulsion of the Acadians, noted Abbé Ferland, remains one of the darkest pages in the history of English domination in America.

When one compares the accounts of the Acadian expulsion as given by authorities of Old France and of Canada with those handed down by the families of those directly concerned, one is forced to admire the vivacity and simplicity of the faith that sustained this people in adversities. As example, in 1756 Intendant Bigot reported to the French Government - "M. de Boishébert, who commands on the River St. John sent us the Captain and crew of a vessel that carried Acadians to the number of 250 from Port Royal to Carolina. This vessel, having become separated in storm from its escorting frigate and from other ships carrying Acadian families, was taken over by mutiny and the Captain was obliged to make port at the River St. Jean." Such was the official report. But the real circumstances of the event, recounted by an old Acadian of Bonaventure whose grandfather and family were in that vessel reported by Intendant Bigot of Québec, were quite different - "A few days after leaving Port Royal a violent storm arose. Among the Acadian exiles were experienced seamen who understood navigation much better than the English crew. Despairing of saving his vessel the Captain called upon the Acadians to come to his rescue. After prayer for Divine Help, the Acadians took over control of the ship and finally brought it safely to harbour at River St. John."

OCCUPATIONS IN 1836

At the time of the Bishop's visit of 1836 the main occupations of the people of Bonaventure were as mariners, farmers and lumbermen. The timber of the Bonaventure River valley was floated down the river for delivery to the firm of GILMOUR. Much of the lumber was loaded at the Bay Chaleur port of Dalhousie for delivery to England.

ON TO CASCAPEDIAC

The episcopal visit to Bonaventure ended on July 14th and the Bishop's party returned on board the SARA near the Point of landing on arrival. Early next morning the schooner put to sea. The weather, foggy at first, cleared to sunshine and a light breeze on the way to Cascapédiac. Abbé Ferland remarks facetiously that it is difficult to fast in Gaspesia. Yesterday, at Bonaventure, they dined on salmon

fresh from the river, today it was fresh cod bought at sea from fishermen at a shilling the dozen !

At noon the breeze freshened. The SARA rounded Black Cape and opened up the view of beautiful Cascapédiac Bay, some thirteen miles in width and five or six miles in depth. The Bishop, Monseigneur de Sidyme was welcomed by the inhabitants gathered on the beach. In the midst of the crowd the Abbé Ferland noted an English sailor, a big man, "evidently a worthy disciple of Bacchus", who acted as an entire Artillery Company in himself. Matchlock in hand, he staggered near the old canon. In the role of Officer he ordered, FIRE!, as artilleryman he applied the match to the powder, and as assistant he added a vigorous HURRAH ! (It would be most interesting to know the name of this militaman of 1826. Perhaps some reader of SPEC could help in such identification)

CASCAPEDIAC COMMENTS

Abbé Ferland reported that the Cascapédiac church building was a good, wooden edifice built under the direction of Father Painchaud. (Ref. "GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY" #90, "TROIS MILLE CLOUS" - THE LIFE AND INFLUENCE OF REV. CHARLES FRANCOIS PAINCHAUD.) The adjoining rectory was occupied by an aged lay-reader and church guardian.

The nearby Little Cascapedia River, before reaching the Bay, served to turn the wheels of the mills of Mr. Cuthbert, a well-to-do Scotch merchant.

The mouth of the Grand Cascapedia River lies a half-league further on to the West. These two rivers water a common, fertile valley bordered by mountains and extending inland up to three leagues from the sea. A number of Scotch and Irish families, recruited by Mr. Cuthbert have begun to clear valley lands and seem to be very satisfied with their first crops. However, the majority of the population of Cascapédiac is of French origin...in fact, with the exception of the English settlements at New Carlisle and Douglstown most of the Gaspesians have always been French and Roman Catholic.

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PART VI



VISITS TO BONAVENTURE AND CASCAPEDIAC.