

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC.

The Missionaries of Gaspe.

Who they were and what they accomplished.

Was Cartier accompanied by a priest chaplain when he made his first trip to Gaspe in 1534? There are some who claim that he was, while others, and we are inclined to accept their view, pretend there was no priest aboard his small flotilla. If he did have a priest with him the latter must have celebrated mass during their stay at Gaspe. They remained there eight days and one a Sunday. The point where the cross was planted was an ideal spot for just such a religious ceremony, and the erection of the symbol of Redemption would have been a splendid occasion for such a solemn demonstration of faith. In that case that priest would really have been the first missionary to set foot on Canadian soil. But there is no record to show whether or not a priest was present and whether mass was actually celebrated.

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The first resident Missionaries in Canada were two Jésuites Fathers. The Reverend Father Pierre Biard and the Reverend Father Ennemond Masse they Resided at Port Royal on the Bay of Fundy Nova Scotia, these Fathers built Canada's first church and College there (Collège de la Flèche)

The first known missionaries to stop at Gaspé were Father Nicolas Viel and Brother Sagard, both of the Recollet order, in 1623.

In 1628, Fathers Charles Lalemant and Paul Raguensau, Jesuits, while on their way to Quebec with de Roquemont's ill-fated expedition, also landed at Gaspé.

They went ashore and hid their provisions where? It is not known. Those provisions and supplies were destroyed by the Kirkes.

Father Lalemant was made a prisoner when de Roquemont's fleet was defeated by the Kirkes. He was taken to England, whence he went to Belgium and then to France. He later returned to Canada and died upon his return to France some time later. He was the uncle of the Holy Martyr Gabriel Lalemant. On June 13th 1632, Father Lejeune S.J., upon his return to his missions, after the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, stopped at Gaspé. "We were obliged to land at Gaspé on the feast of the Holy Trinity," he writes. "I celebrated mass there in a cabin constructed by some fishermen from Honfleur" The location of that cabin is most likely the site of the Kavanagh property, where the first Catholic chapel was built in 1829, just before one enters the basin of Gaspé, near the cemetery.

(This was the first mass to be celebrated at Gaspé.)

In 1635, Fathers Charles Trugis, and Charles Du Marché both

Jesuits, were sent to Miscou with jurisdiction over Gaspé. The first died there of scurvy, in 1637. Father Du Marché, who had gone to Quebec, returned to take his place. He was later joined by Father Jean Dolbeau, S. J.

In 1640, Father Antoine Richard, S. J. who had been in Canada since 1634, went to work with Father Dolbeau, when the later also fell a victim to scurvy in 1643, he was replaced by Father Martin de Lyonne, S.J. who remained there until 1661. He too died of scurvy at Chedabouctou in 1661. In 1651, Father Buteau, S.J. visited Gaspé.

After the death of Father de Lyonne, Father Pierre Bailloquet, S. J. of the mission of Tadoussac, visited Gaspé. Towards 1670 Father Jean Morain, S. J. came as a missionary to the Gaspé région.

In a letter to Father Lejeune, Father Richard states that the Indians of Gaspe and Miscou have heard of the Gospel they all have a desire to join the Church.

Those missionaries did not attend only to the Indians. They also looked after the spiritual needs of the resident fishermen.

The "Relations" of those missionaries describe certain details respecting the manner of living in Gaspe, and the same applies to the "Journal of the Jesuits."

In 1669, at the request of Intendant Talon, The French Minister Colbert gave the Recollet Fathers permission to return to Canada to take charge of the parishes. The evangelization of the Indians was left to the Jesuits.

Fathers Hilarion Guesnin and Exupère Dethunes arrived at Percé in the spring of 1673 and built a "home" and the first chapel. Two years later, a third missionary, Father Christian Leclercq, replaced them, assisted by Father Joseph Denys, of the parish of St. Antoine de Pade, in Artois, France. He arrived on October the 29th 1675.

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on board the "Lion d'Or" after a narrow escape from shipwreck on the coast of Anticosti Island.

Father Joseph Denys was born in Canada and was most certainly The first Canadian born priest.

In 1682, he was joined by Father Emmanuel Juneau, who drew a map of New France. "This mission, Father Leclercq wrote, was Given to us by Count de Frontenac with Bishop de Laval's Consent."

In 1690, the missionary establishments of the Recollets at Percé were destroyed by a landing party of the fleet commanded by Admiral Phipps and the Recollets returned to France. Later, when the treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, gave Acadie to England, the same religious did not have an opportunity to return.

It is not known whether or not there were any missionaries on the Gaspé coast or at Gaspé, between the years 1690 and 1760.

Some Sulpician Fathers came to Acadia during that period but it would appear that none of them went into the Gaspé region.

So that the last missionary to stop at Gaspé, according to all available records, was Father Aulneau (1734)

This brings to a close the list of the missionaries who came to Gaspé during the French regime.

And what can one say of the work and the sacrifices of those missionaries? The following extract of one of Father Leclercq's narratives will give an idea of how those apostles of the Faith felt; It is very true that it is only God who is able to alleviate, by the unction of His grace, the apostolic labours of the arduous missions of New France; therefore it must be frankly admitted, that all the forces of Nature would only serve to increase the difficulties of the missionaries, if the Cross of a crucified God, did not impart

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to them a part of the victorious power by which He triumphed gloriously over all which He suffered most harsh and most sorrowful in the shame of Calvary.

" I have never had an experience more illustrative of this truth than in the voyage which I undertook in order to go and administer the Sacrements to the Cross-bearer Indians."

And yet, they were fond of their missions. They went through all kinds of dangers and tribulations, as Father Richard did; they contracted serious illness, like Father de Lyonne; they even died like Father Turgis. But they were contented, they were even happy to be there where God wished them to be. One of them, as he was leaving Miscou, left his bonnet on the altar as a sign of possession and to indicate that he intended coming back.

They felt great consolation through the baptisms they administered and the sermons they preached. They also sometimes had the joy of noticing how fond some of the poor natives were of them and freely expressed their feelings of affection. "Well my son," said one of the Indian chiefs, addressing Father Leclercq as he was about to leave for France, " you wish to leave us and return to your country. Could you only see my heart, you would see how it sheds tears of blood just as my eyes are shedding tears of water, because it suffers so much on account of this cruel separation." Is it therefore surprising that they returned to their missions whenever they had an opportunity?

If there are moments of discouragement, the Superior is there to encourage them. We know of one missionary who, when he asked to be recalled from his mission in Gaspé, received an answer something like this; "Courage, dear Father, it is for the souls and for Christ. It was He who first gave the example of all sacrifices." The missionary was

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so strengthened by those words that he regretted he had ever made the request and offered his most sincere excuses to his Superior.

The first missionary to serve the Gaspé coast under the British Rule was Father La Brosse of the Jesuit order who spent the years 1771 and 1772 there.

The first to reside there permanently was Father Mathurin Bourq from 1773 to 1795. Surviving the deportation of 1775. Father Bourq after eight years of exile and detention in England, as prisoner of war, and eight years of study at Paris, had been ordained priest at Montreal by Bishop Briand, on September 19th 1772.

Father Bourq established his residence at Carleton and adding to his annual apostolic tours around Gaspé Peninsula. In a memoir of 1787 he mentions coming every year to Percé. Father Louis-Joseph Desjardins, who succeeded him in 1795 to 1801 emphasizes immediately to Bishop Plessis "Percé has need of a missionary for a longer sojourn" the correspondence of Father Doucet missionary of Percé in 1845 pays homage to the Kindly Remembrance in which Father Desjardins held Gaspesia.

In 1797 a second missionary Father de La Vaivre of the Diocese of Lyon was sent to Bonaventure and took care of the eastern half of the Gaspé coast until 1801. Then a third missionary Father Alexis Le François from the same diocese was sent to Percé. He and his immediate successors were to perform their ministry from Pabos to Fox River.

From 1801 to 1806 Carleton had Father Auguste Amyot in 1806 to 1814 Father Charles-François Painchard succeeded him. In 1807 Father Alexis Le François was sent to L'Ile-au-Coudes and with Father de La Vaivre sick Percé came again under the care of the missionary