

EPISCOPAL

His Excellency François de Montmorency-Laval.

- 1674-1688 First bishop of Quebec,
1623- Born April 30th at Chateau de Montigny sur-aure in the diocese of Chartres at Orleanais France. Son of Hughes de Laval and Michelle de Perjcard.
1658- Consecrated bishop on June 3rd at Petrée France.
1658- Appointed apostolic vicar of Canada on December 8th
1659- Arrived at Quevec June, 4th.
1674- Appointed bishop of Quebec (First) and (First of Canada)
1688- Resigned the see of Quebec,
1708- Died in France.

EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS

The first episcopal visitation to Gaspé was that of bishop Laval May 16th 1659. The first Bishop of Quebec stopped there before taking over his see and confirmed one hundred and forty persons.

In June 1685 Bishop de St-Vallier, whom Bishop de Laval had just appointed his Vical general stopped there a first time before reaching Quebec in the company of the Marquis de Denonville, who for his part, had just been named Governor. He returned on an official visit in August of the following year.

In 1795 Bishop Hubert of Quebec stopped at Gaspé.

Other bishops visited the district, but few of them stopped at Gaspé: Bishop Plessis, 1811; Bishop Turgeon, in 1836 who also visited Douglastown; and Bishop Baillargeon, who visited Gaspé in 1852 and administered the sacrament of Confirmation.

The regular episcopal visits began only when the first bishop of Rimouski, Bishop Jean Langevin went to Gaspé in 1871. He returned in 1876, 1880 and 1884.

Bishop Blais went there in 1890, 1893, 1901, 1909, 1913, and 1916. He was followed by bishop Leonard, and finally it was His Excellency F. X. Ross, first resident bishop of Gaspé.

EPISCOPAL GASPE

Founding of the Diocese His Excellency Bishop F. X. Ross First Expansion.

As early as 1849, the founding of the district of Gaspé into a diocese, was talked of, but it did not materialize. The first diocese to be created shortly afterwards was that of Rimouski, in 1867, and it included the entire district of Gaspé.

New attempts were made from 1901 to 1904, but without any greater success. Bishop Leonard was to bring into being the new diocese through his efforts. Having made a tour of Gaspesia in the summer of 1920, to administer Confirmation, he came to the conclusion that there should be either a vicar general or a bishop at Gaspé. Having obtained an expression of opinion of all unanimous in supporting his views, he appointed a commission to study the matter. The commission went to work and reported in favor of a diocese to include all of Bonaventure and Gaspé counties.

There was some difficulty in reaching a decision as to where the episcopal see should be established. There had been some expression of opinion in favor of Bonaventure and some others favored Gaspé.

The report of the Commission dealing with the matter pointed out that the immediate situation of a bishop would not be as agreeable, and even difficult in Gaspé when compared with St. Bonaventure. He would be isolated from his principal parishes for a fairly long time.

He could probably find decent lodgings in the presbytery and use the little church for the time being. But, it added, the bishop is to be for the diocese and not the diocese for the bishop. He will be there to prepare for the future and not to enjoy the present. Like the first discoverer, the first bishop of Gaspé will plant his cross to take possession of the land for Christ.

The three members of the Commission were bishop F. X. Ross and Canons Fortunat Charron and Victor Côté. Bishop Ross was then Vicar-General of Bishop Ph. Sylvain.

When the report had been completed and signed a petition was prepared to be presented to His Holiness the Pope of Rome, asking for the creation of the diocese of Gaspé which would include the whole of Gaspé and Bonaventure, with the episcopal see at Gaspé.

The petition contained the detailed reasons for the respectful request and for the choice of Gaspé as the episcopal see.

Bishop Leonard himself took the petition to Rome to place it before the Holy Father.

After the usual and necessary delays in matters of such importance the news was finally received that His Holiness had granted the request and that a new diocese should be created in Gaspé.

On December the 6th Bishop Pietro Di Maria, Apostolic Delegate, wired bishop Leonard: "Choice of Gaspé official" and on the 11th His Eminence Cardinal Cagiano signed four apostolic bulls the first appointing bishop Ross as new bishop of Gaspé; the second notifying the bishop elected to have himself consecrated and to make his profession of faith; the third to notify the people of the diocese of Gaspé and the fourth to appoint His Eminence Cardinal Bégin to have all the instructions contained in the decision from Rome carried out.

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There was great rejoicing in the new diocese when the good news became known. Joy because it felt that it had gained its religious autonomy and joy at the selection of their first bishop. Born at the very extremity of Gaspesia, at Grosse Roches, on the March 6th 1869. Bishop Ross had been in touch with his diocese a long time previously, when, as a very young man he had made a pilgrimage to Ste. Anne des Monts. He had made a tour of Gaspesia as private secretary, on two pastoral visits, in 1893 and 1894. He had lived the life of Gaspe since he had begun his ecclesiastical duties as parish priest of Matapedia (1896-98) and had later founded Anse-Aux-Gascons. Moreover, he had been Vicar-General of Rimouski for many years. Administrator and Capitulary Vicar of Rimouski while the see was vacant, reporter of the Commission appointed to study the project of the division of the old diocese of Rimouski and author of the report taken by bishop Leonard to Rome. He is a man of very great vision, exceedingly broad-minded and with the highest and loftiest ideals, of deep piety and zeal for the extension of the kingdom of the Master. He offered every guarantee of success in the most difficult mission and exalted position in the Church, and no other could have been received by all the people with greater pleasure and enthusiasm. No one possesses the same insight into the future great needs of Gaspe, nobody knows more about its rich resources and tremendous possibilities, and the history of Gaspesia has no secrets for him.

The consecration was fixed for the 1st of May 1923. In the meantime the new bishop took possession of his diocese, on February the 26th. He appointed Bishop J. E. Matte as his Vicar-General.

The great celebration of the consecration took place on May the 1st, feast of St. Philip and St. James, with unusual magnificence

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and religious fervor, in the Cathedral of Rimouski. The ceremony was presided over by His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, assisted by Their Excellencies Bishop Leonard and Bishop Chiasson. High church and state dignitaries assisted at the ceremony.

The following day the new bishop of Gaspé left for his future residence at Gaspé accompanied by several bishops and all the priests on the coast. At every station the people gathered to welcome their new bishop and to cheer him as he smiled at them from the railway carriage.

But it was at Gaspé itself that he was to get the greatest and most hearty reception. Every thing had been prepared for a real royal welcome. The ice which still connected both shores of the basin had been sawn to allow Bishop Ross and his suite to cross in a boat.

His Excellency Bishop Ross, himself tells of his reception at his arrival at Gaspé, in 1923, " Since the good people did not wish their bishop to take his seat at York they adopted heroic measures: armed with saws, axes and cables drawn by horses, they undertook to open the way through the Basin, following the example of Moses when he crossed the Red Sea. The only difference was, that while the Hebrews passed dry-shod between two liquid walls, the bishop of Gaspé passed upon a liquid way between two hedges of ice, that was melting under the rays of a spring sun rather than at the sight of the bishop who feared every moment that all his beautiful projects might fall overboard and be lost. And it was by climbing up an icy wall by means of a ladder, that the Bishop was able to enter his episcopal town. Baker's Hotel offered the most generous hospitality to the guests of Gaspé's first bishop. The following day, May the 3rd, the feast of the Discovery of the Holy Cross, the official enthroning took place

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in the presence of a vast crowd of people who had gathered from the entire region or district.

The same day His Excellency Bishop Ross issued his first public manifesto. In it he referred to the great significance of the Cross. The cross planted four centuries before by Jacques Cartier and again erected upon the same soil by the bishop of Gaspé. "Let us grow and develop in the shadow of that Cross; let our well meant activities, coordinated and disciplined, cover our territory with deeds of real and true progress."

The bishop then also exhibited his great zeal for the spiritual and intellectual development of his new flock. He intimated the creation of a Seminary and of a Normal School "We must, without delay, organize a small seminary. We must get busy and get busy quick."

Later His Excellency informed his people that His Holiness the Pope of Rome had kindly sent his special blessing to the bishop's new flock.

And on July 21st, Bishop Ross issued a programme in which he traced a plan of campaign for the development of agriculture colonization and the fisheries, and pointed out the great part the clergy could take in all such movements.

A residence purchased from Mrs. Blackwell who lived in England, was to be used as the bishop's palace. That building erected by Colonel J. J. Belleau, in 1845, needed to be enlarged and put in order and furnished, so the bishop retired to the presbytery. He entered his new home the following year on May 1st, 1924. He resided there until the Fall of 1930. The Rev. Sister of Mont-Laurier had the care of the house from 1927 to 1930. When the Missionary Sisters of Christ the

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King were obliged to seek new quarters, as their own home had become too small, His Excellency very kindly and generously gave them the use of the episcopal residence and retired to the Ursuline Monastery.

Until he moved to the present palace in 1942. This residence to-day is nearly hundred years old, it was built around 1860 by John and Elias Collas, on the site of the cathedral, it has changed hands many time since then in the 1910's ~~to~~ Robin Jones and Whitman owned it in the 1920's K. J. Carter, and finally, Bishop Ross bought it and moved it to its present site, redecorated and enlarged it. He moved to it only in 1942.

The Rectors of Gaspe Basin have resided in various places since the fire in 1929, First at the Holy Rosary convent, in 1942 the R_ector moved to the Bishop's Palace and in 1953 Father F. Rancourt built the parish a Rectory.

The Diocese of Gaspe at present includes sixty four Parishes and nineteen Missions.