

**Sunny Bank, Our Ancestral Home  
By Andrew Patterson (1995)**

**Chapter 7**

**The Gaspé Fish Hatchery**

One of the earliest attempts in Canada to artificially incubate fish eggs during the winter to achieve an increased yield was undertaken in Gaspé. After an extensive overhaul of the Dartmouth River in the summer of 1873, A. Wilmot recommended the Mill Brook in L'Anse Aux Cousins as being the ideal site for the breeding establishment. Land was bought from Mr. Henry Davis and construction was undertaken immediately. The original building was over sixty feet long and contained breeding boxes with a total capacity in excess of one million salmon eggs. At the same time a retaining pond was built on the York River to hold parent salmon until breeding time. In the first year of production, 1874, thirty female salmon were captured yielding approximately 20,000 eggs. Since this was insufficient it was decided to import eggs from Miramichi, New Brunswick.

During the late 1890's the L'Anse Aux Cousins site was abandoned after a decline in productivity largely due to old and dilapidated facilities. In 1900 a combined lobster and salmon hatchery was constructed on Dean's Brook in Gaspé Harbour, where both salt and fresh water were plentiful. The first shipment of 800,000 salmon ova arrived in November, 1901, and the hatchery began operations with R. Lindsay in charge. This hatchery operated for about fifteen seasons but, in the Department of Marine and Fisheries Annual Reports, no further mention was made to the raising of lobsters.

In about 1915, the Gaspé Fish Hatchery changed locations once again, moving to Sunny Bank, where it was constructed across the road from the site of the school. This new establishment consisted of one building in which the eggs were stored during winter, and a series of outside ponds to hold the fry while awaiting distribution in July. A dam was constructed about one hundred yards up Mac's Brook, providing water for the hatchery which raised almost two million fry annually. This reservoir remained in use until the late 1970's, continuing to supplement the hatchery's water supply. In addition, it was tapped and the water was used for flooding the York Rink until a well was drilled in the early 1980's.



The retaining pond, which had been constructed in 1874, on a distributary of the York River called the Old Main River, remained in use until the 1940's. It was used for holding adult salmon before they spawned. Each spring local men were hired to clean out the brush from the spring run-off and put up new fences. Net fishermen made trap nets to catch adult

salmon. These were towed up to the 'ford' behind a motorboat. The caretaker, who for many years was Coleman Patterson, tended the salmon and kept the pond in good repair during the summer months. After spawning in the early fall, eggs were taken to the hatchery and provided with a constant flow of fresh water until spring when they hatched. Both the retaining pond and the hatchery provided badly needed employment for Sunny Banker residents.

In 1938, the Gaspé Fish Hatchery moved to its fourth and final site, near the mouth of the Mill Brook. Interestingly enough that was precisely the same site chosen almost two hundred years earlier by French speaking settlers to construct their lumber mill. During excavation of the present site, parts of the original mill were unearthed.

This new hatchery has undergone many changes since its initial construction, but it has continued to employ local residents and remains a major tourist attraction. For a period of time in the 1970's, as an added attraction, a pen housing over a dozen white-tailed deer was added. The hatchery also provided summer employment for students serving as tourist guides. During the 1950's and 60's dozens of tourists passed each day, making the hatchery one of Gaspé's premier tourist attractions.

The present-day Fish Hatchery consists of two large buildings, housing eggs and fry, two residences for employees, and several outside fish ponds. The grounds are still well maintained, but budget cuts have reduced their importance. There is now much less concern for the tourist aspect, with more emphasis on fish production.

In 1977 this establishment still had six English speaking employees out of seven. As the older workers retired, they were gradually replaced with French speaking people, consistent with government policy. The hatchery has gone from a part of the community to a foreign establishment within Sunny Bank. Once the workers would gladly volunteer to help with community work such as clearing snow from the York Rink. If a local resident needed equipment they didn't have, they could borrow it from the hatchery.