

bulk of the mail came from Quebec by Gulf port steamers once a week, and he spoke of the wonderful increase in quantity during that generation. One daily mail of to-day, of fifteen or twenty sacks, is as heavy as the weekly mails of that time.

Many and varied were the experiences of the mail-couriers in this cold district of Gaspé in the olden days. When we remember the difficult mode of travelling, by foot, with snowshoes and dogs, alone, along a lonely forest trail, with no way of crossing rivers, swift and deep, excepting by long detours, we can imagine how much of suffering and hardship were attendant upon the conveyance of the mail.

One of the early couriers, plying between Gaspé and Cape de Rosier, had large feet, evidenced by the fact that he wore No. 11 boots. At each stride he covered a distance of one and a half yards. Many years of toilsome tramping with H. M. mail upon his back left their mark upon him; finally, he was unable to straighten himself. His head, too, had acquired the habit of continual bowing. When the old man died, his coffin was larger than common, because of the poor, twisted body, deformed and worn out on the weary postal trail.

The heroism often exercised in the preservation of the mail, and the infrequency of accident and loss to the precious cargo was most wonderful. But, notwithstanding every care, occasionally the mail was lost, as once at Pabos River, when horse, sleigh and mail disappeared in the greedy, angry waters. Faithful adherence to duty was a characteristic of the mail-drivers. One courier, who went "on the mail" when only a boy of twelve years, and continued at the task for over a decade, was no exception to the rule. He had no pleasing experience on the ice of Aouville Barachois (Lagoon), being overtaken by a furious storm of wind and snow. Everything, the mail included, was blown out of the sleigh, but through the long, cold hours of that winter night Robert Kerr remained beside the horse. When morning came he dug out the mail, and, half-frozen, pushed on. Another time, seeking to avoid possible open places in the ice of Carleton, he was only warned in time of the greater danger by the sound of the open sea near-by.

Sometimes the protection of the mail was attended with considerable risk, as in 1892, when Driver Goulette (who, by the way, was a very powerful man, it being no uncommon feat to raise a fifty-six pound weight above his head on his little finger) was accosted one night by two men at the Governor's Road, in New Richmond. One seized the horse by the head, and the other ordered the driver to hold up his hands, and proceeded to cut the mail bags. Goulette remembered that he was driving the famous "Diamond," who, previous to his becoming an automaton on the mail route, was never driven except with a Liverpool chain bit. Of two things he was certain: First, if he could get a straight right-hander at the man on the mail bags, it would be a sufficiently effective anæsthetic to put him temporarily out of the game; and again, if he could get one cut of the whip at "Diamond," it would at least be no boy's job either to keep him stationary, or to accompany him on his journey. It was a dangerous experiment, but Goulette was sufficiently courageous and faithful to his duty to attempt it. As the man who was operating on the mail bags was at his left side, he quietly lowered his right, under the cover of the darkness, and dealt the would-be robber such a blow that he left the skin of two of his knuckles somewhere to mark the spot. Grasping the whip as near instantaneously as a man of Goulette's dimensions could move, he brought it down upon his faithful

horse with such force that only a few inches of the handle remained in his grasp. "Diamond" did the rest, and Goulette always wondered how the man at the bridle would explain what happened. The Government granted Goulette fifty dollars for his brave defence of Her Majesty's property.

So accustomed were the mail horses to the road that Augustus Kerr's old "Bob" would trot over the road in the spring, when the farmers would not think of taking their horses out of their barns.

Once a driver, during a storm, had missed the post office, and decided to

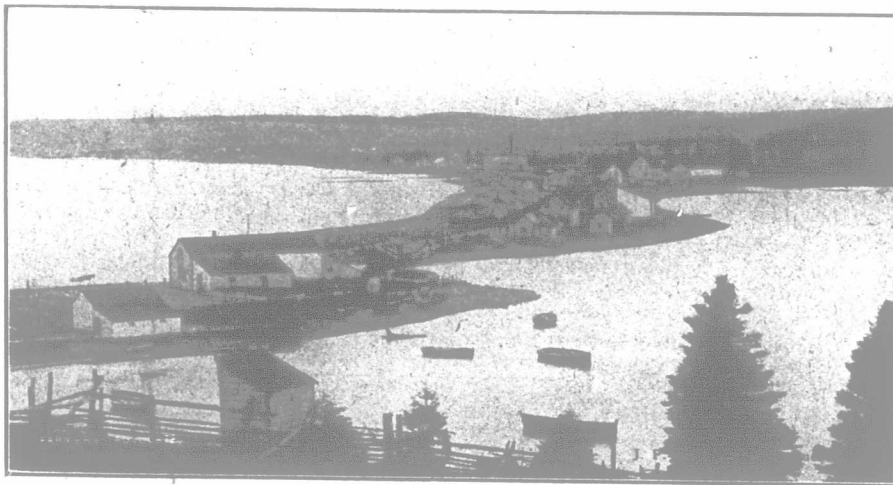
he showed her his spread. Struck with terror, the poor woman cried:

"Oh, Lord, Davie! You've robbed the mail!"

"No, mother!" he replied. "That's what I got by carrying the mail on my back, instead of with a horse."

Occasionally a practical joke was played on the courier. David Kerr had a lawyer for a passenger. Taking from his pocket a silver dollar, he asked the man of law its value. Pocketing the coin, the lawyer remarked: "You just owe me a shilling for my advice."

The experiences of Daniel Thompson, of New Carlisle, now an old



Port Daniel.

let it pass; so, rolling himself in the sleigh robes, he settled to sleep. However, the horse knew his business. Entering a yard, he turned, and the driver was awakened by the stopping of the horse at the neglected office.

At another time, the mail being late, the courier requested a traveller ahead of him to give him the "right-of-way." Permission to pass being refused, the driver demanded the road for H. M. mail. Still the man persisted in his refusal. Without more ado, the mail horse took the road and sped on its way, leaving the disobliging and discomfited traveller to get his overturned and wrecked cutter into shape as best he could.

It was no uncommon occurrence for courier Joseph Meredith, when unable to get along on account of the condition of the roads, to put up his horse in the barn of a hospitable farmer, and, with the mail bag upon his back, trudge a mile and a half to Carleton post office, and back again

man, illustrate very forcibly the hardships endured and the difficulties overcome by the early mail-drivers. Mr. Thompson was a sub-contractor under David Kerr, from New Carlisle to Pabos, for over four years, going twice a week.

One day the Gaspé mail brought a passenger to Pabos, a young woman, who asked courier Thompson to give her a passage "up the Bay." The roads being still in bad condition, the result of a recent storm, the courier tried to persuade her to wait till his next regular trip. But she would not listen to him, and succeeded in securing passage with another man. The poor girl was scantily clad, and nearly frozen on the open sleigh, when she reached Newport, where the mail stopped to feed both man and horse. Ere long he overtook the travellers. The snow was so deep that it was half-way up the horse's sides. Scarcely able to speak, the woman cried:

This trip, like many others with the Gaspé mail, was free.

On another occasion, Mr. Thompson left D. Kerr's, in Caplin, in the morning, risking one night's ice. The ferryman proffered his services as pilot. Reaching the channel, horse, sleigh, man and mail disappeared in the treacherous water. So suddenly did the horse go through that the men were thrown forward, striking and breaking the dashboard. Clinging to the horse's legs and harness, they scrambled out. Determined to save the mail, if possible, he reached one of the straps, which he tried to pull clear. Finally, getting his knife, and holding to the sleigh, he cut the two bags clear, and threw them upon the ice. The other man was still in the water, holding up the horse's head. Seeing the affair from the shore, a man ran with a rail, and saved the two men. Choking the horse with a rope, they succeeded in getting him out of the water. By this time, Thompson was so exhausted with cold and fatigue that he was unable to make any further effort. Finally a man dragged him ashore, where he was taken in hand by a son of Judge Winter, who, by rubbing and warm applications, succeeded in restoring circulation to the nearly-exhausted courier. The mail went on, being hauled across the Bonaventure River, and a horse obtained on the other side.

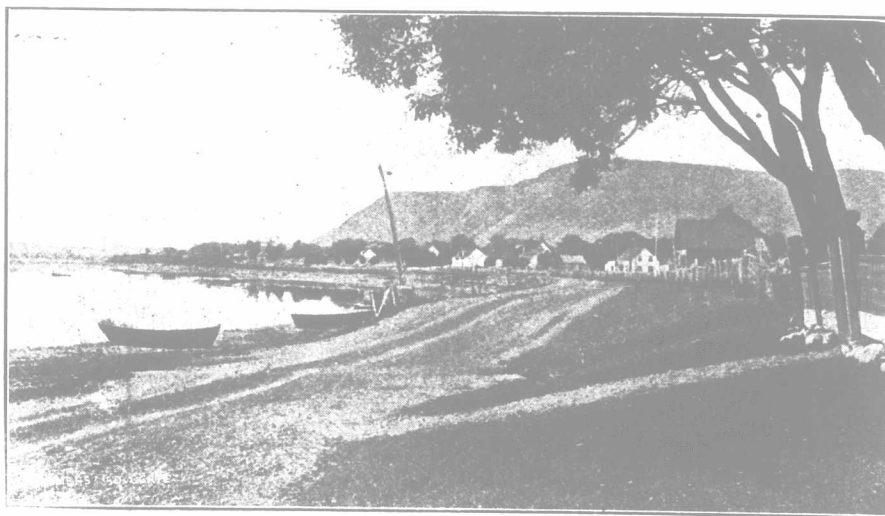
Another time, at Newport, during a heavy rain-storm, the water on the road was ten feet deep. Placing two boards side by side, the mail horse was led over to the good road. Again, at Point Macquero portage, during a furious storm, he only succeeded in going fourteen miles in fourteen hours, having to unhitch every few rods and dig his horse out of the snow, dragging the sleigh and mail bags, going before the horse, and making every effort to push through. In vain he looked for a friend or neighbor; he was the only one on the road. In a pitiable state he reached Mr. Jessup's, at New Port.

"Take care of my horse!" he exclaimed. "My feet are in a terrible state."

Hurrying him into the house, Mr. Jessup got one of his feet into water, while Mrs. Jessup worked over the other. For two hours they strove to save his feet. So intense was the pain that it was only with difficulty he could restrain a cry of agony. During the remainder of the winter he was unable to wear either boots or moccasins.

One spring, the roads were so bad that Thompson left his horse at New Port, and crossed in a flat-bottomed boat to Pabos. There he was met by Archie Kerr, Jr., with a horse who brought the Perce mail back to the Pabos River during the night. Fastening it on his back, Courier Thompson tramped through four feet of water. When it became too deep to walk, he crawled slowly and carefully along on his hands and knees, dragging the mail bags nearly 300 yards. Shouldering the mail, he at last arrived at the house of a Frenchman, whom he roused and persuaded to carry the mail to New Port islands, promising him twenty-five cents and a fig of tobacco in remuneration, while, cold and dripping as he was, he tried to follow him.

The experiences of Hugh Ross were of a different character, but with an interest of their own. One clear, moon-lit winter night he was driving merrily through Maria, conversing with a passenger, when his attention was arrested by the immense size of a man who had stepped aside to allow him to pass. He appeared to tower nearly eight feet above the sleigh. Questioning the postmaster at the next office, he learned that there were reports of the strange doings of an unknown man of great strength; the rough handling experienced by two strong Irishmen who sought to interview him had resulted in three weeks' illness on their part, while the iden-



Carleton,—Co. Bonaventure, P. Q.

to his horse. The inhabitants did their best to keep an open road. Even the priest of the parish—Rev. Mr. Audet, more than once, in Carleton, shovel in hand, joined the workers in their endeavor to force a passage for the mail.

But Mr. Kerr would send his son David to Miguasha, where he would get a dollar and a quarter to get a horse and a meal. But, looking to the future, the lad would not go, and walked. At Carleton, the boy counted on getting a horse and enough to get home to his mother.

"Mr. Thompson! For God's sake, will you take me on your sleigh to save my life?"

Removing her from the empty sleigh, and wrapping her in his buffalo coat, he covered her with the two buffalo robes, she shivering the while like an aspen leaf. There were still five heavy, weary miles to travel before they reached a house at Gascons, where she was warmed and fed. Then the journey was resumed till Port Daniel was reached, where the night was spent and horses changed. The poor driver was nearly perished for the want of his coat.