

Percé to Gaspé

(By MARGARET GRANT MACWHIRTER.)

Our steamer reached Percé, of historic and legendary fame. This place has been known to the world since 1534, when Jacques Cartier visited it and gave to either Percé Rock or Mont Joli the name of Cap de Prés. Also, since the close of the Sixteenth Century, the French continued to visit the spot in search, even in those early days, of cod. Later, Champlain, from Quebec, frequently sent boats to Percé with despatches for France. An infant colony was begun by Richard Denys de Fronsac and a chapel built by the Recollet Fathers in 1673.

Remote though Percé was from the seat of war, nevertheless, in 1690, it was unexpectedly attacked and pillaged.

The two small villages into which Percé (now the County Seat of Gaspé) is divided are known as North and South Beach, and between them is a headland named Mont Joli, which is generally supposed to have been formerly joined to Percé Rock. The village nestles at the base of lofty Mount Ste. Anne, which rises abruptly to the height of 1,300 feet. This mountain is a welcome sight to vessels coming up the St. Lawrence, being discernible at a distance of nearly eighty miles.

Grand beyond anything I had ever seen, towered the mountains at the rear of Percé village, which lies immediately at the foot; while far above is the Cross of Ste. Anne silhouetted against the sky. Involuntarily the words rose to my lips:

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife."

The inhabitants are descendants of people who came from Guernsey, Jersey and France.

The story is told that in the old war-days a man-of-war entered Percé to impress men for the service. A man named Lago was taken and the king's shilling dropped into his pocket. Escaping, he ran for his life, dodging between the fishing buildings, whither the officer, determined to have his man, followed in hot pursuit. Hearing his screams, his sister, who in size was considerably above the average, hastened to the rescue and suddenly the officer was confronted by an angry woman armed with a hoe, one well-directed blow of which felled him to the ground, from whence he was carried aboard ship.

No farther than two hundred yards from Mont Joli rises the immense bulk of Percé Rock.

Dr. Clarke, in his "Sketches of Gaspé," thus describes the great barrier: "Fifteen hundred feet long by two hundred and eighty-eight feet high at its peak or inner point. At its greatest width it is about three hundred feet through the rear of the great rock itself is perforated by an arched tunnel about sixty feet high."

Startled by the steamer's whistle, innumerable gulls and cormorants flew into the air uttering loud cries, for the top of the "Pierced Rock," though now inaccessible to man, makes a safe eyrie whereon to rear their young. A man on board remarked the beauty and grandeur of the scene; then, turning towards the Rock, he observed, "There's an old legend attached to Percé Rock."

Long ago—so runs the tale—a French frigate had come to Percé, where one of the sailors met and fell in love with one of Percé's fair maidens. So infatuated was he with the girl that he determined to desert his ship. Only one place of shelter offered, and he succeeded in scaling Percé Rock, where he defied capture, even under a fusillade from the frigate's guns. When at length the man-o'-war departed, young Neptune was at liberty to descend from his retreat to his anxious lady-love.

When thanking my informant for the story, I told him that the search of months had been rewarded; hitherto I had sought

in vain for the legend of the Pierced Rock. Sir Gilbert Parker, in his "Battle of the Strong," gives a different version of what is probably the same tale. Still another story relates to a young woman who decreed to be wedded upon the great rock, and from this lofty pedestal probably descended to a more lowly lot.

Still another, less romantic but more ghostly, tells how a pirate, aided by a faithful sailor, buried his treasure upon the Great Rock; then slaying his man, left his body, according to the popular belief, to guard the gold.

Although now inaccessible to man, it was not always so, for several of the first inhabitants climbed the rock by means of ladders to cut the hay which flourished there. However, a law was passed by the authorities forbidding the ascent in consequence of a man having been killed while attempting the feat. Now it is only barren rock.

The road from Percé to Corner of the Beach is through the mountains, known locally as "Through the Falls." It is exceedingly hilly and in many places precipitous, flanked on one side by a wall of rock hundreds of feet high, while on the other the road over-reaches the cliff, which in places extends dizzily below. There are five miles of this hilly and toilsome road, but before the eye of the traveller extends a beautiful panorama, rivalling European scenery in beauty and picturesqueness. In time the road descends to the sea-level, and at Corner of the Beach commences a long sand-bar four miles in extent. On the right, the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence roll in gently, and the air, laden with the tang of the ocean beyond, comes as a refreshing breeze to the traveller who has been sweltering on the Percé hills. On the left is the "Barachois" or lagoon, which at high-water resembles a lake and again at ebb-tide is a muddy flat ornamented with

for, insignificant as this rock would seem to be, it could tell a tale of a good ship wrecked upon its jagged rocks—all on board perishing.

Across the expanse of water stands Ship Head, as though disputing the right-of-way to the River St. Lawrence. Grim and unapproachable at the extreme east of the Peninsula of Gaspé, the great headland forms a break-water, against which the "White Caps" dash in vain. On its brow a lighthouse warns the mariner of its presence. The rocks, popularly known as "old man and woman," were familiar sights at Ship Head, but one has succumbed and the bereaved partner braves the winds and waves alone.

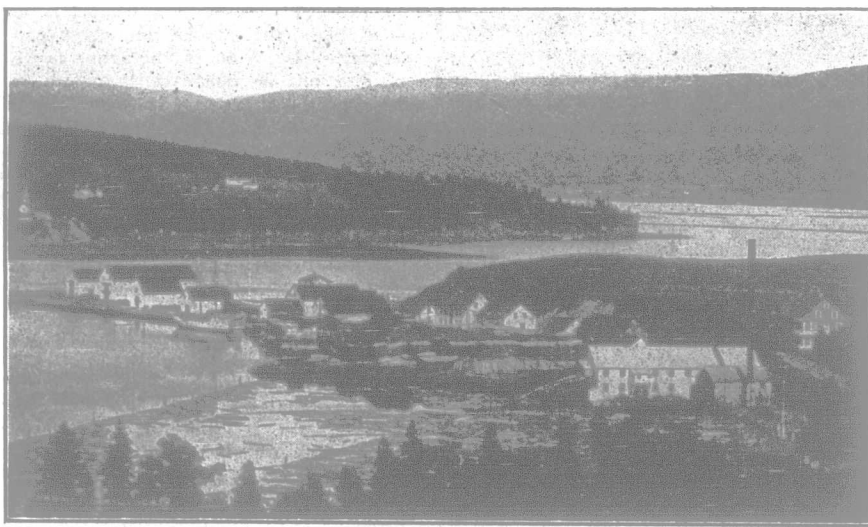
A road across the Peninsula leads to Fox River on the St. Lawrence. Grand Grève is an important place on Peninsula with large fishing establishments.

An old legend of Seal Rock, on the Ship Head Road, tells how the quarter-dollar may still be pointed out, embedded in the rock, where it was placed by his Satanic majesty when settling with the fishermen with whom he had fished all summer.

From Point St. Peter the steamer enters Gaspé Bay. Great bold cliffs, from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet high, rise perpendicularly, almost from the water's edge. A pretty dip in the high bank is Seal Cove.

Douglastown is the most important place, with its Roman Catholic church, which was the first one erected in this part of the country. The steamer drew up to the breakwater built out in the sea, from which passengers, etc., are conveyed to the shore in a boat.

Seven miles farther and our good ship steamed into Gaspé wharf, and we have reached our destination. Gaspé Basin is a harbour so large and secure that it is a haven for all kinds of craft—here they can ride securely in this safe retreat, let the wind blow and the sea lash as it will outside.



Entrance to Gaspé, Que.

occasional pools of water. On a hot summer day a more pleasant drive could hardly be imagined, but, when the cold rough storms of early winter prevail, there are few more inhospitable places than between the two waters on the sand-bar at Barachois. By means of a ferry in summer, the crossing to the opposite shore is accomplished. Two-and-a-half miles from the mainland is Bonaventure Island fully two - and - a - half miles long by three-quarters of a mile broad. Here Messrs. Le Boutillier have a large fishing establishment.

The next place of importance on the route is Point St. Peter, with extensive fishing industries. The Messrs. Le Marquand have a large establishment for the capture of the valued cod which abound in these waters. A short distance from the shore is the rocky islet of Plateau, upon which a lighthouse has been erected—

According to Mr. Pye:

"For picturesque scenery and quiet beauty, Gaspé Basin is unsurpassed by any other locality on the coast. The shape of the Basin is irregular, being about four miles long, with an average width of about half a mile; but, so completely landlocked, that even when a heavy gale prevails outside there is scarcely a ripple to be seen on its clear, deep water."

Every spot abounds in interest. In this vicinity Jacques Cartier raised the Cross and Fleur de Lis, while in later days Wolfe paused on his way to the conquest of Canada. Gaspé supplied Quebec with fish until 1758.

Through the kindness of Mr. Hamon, Agent of the "C.R.C.," at Paspébiac, I was permitted to see an old picture of Gaspé Bay—the work of Capt. Harvey Smith—which is in their possession, but

in which there is little resemblance to the Gaspé of to-day.

Gaspé had several visitations in the old war-days. Large settlements were destroyed in 1690, 1711, and by Wolfe in 1758. The number of cannon and balls found in various places indicate that Gaspé was not unknown to the privateers and men-of-war.

Despatches of the war testify that a French ship, "La Caterina," was sunk by Captain Byron in 1760 in Gaspé waters, but I was unable to ascertain the exact location. Dr. John M. Clark, of the State Museum, Albany, has written an interesting pamphlet descriptive of a wooden "portrait medallion" of Jacques Cartier, bearing the date 1704 and the initials "J.C." which was discovered in an old house near Cap de Rosier.

The principal English settlers in Gaspé Basin were Loyalists and soldiers, who took up land after the Conquest.

The earliest were the O'Haras and Stewarts. The first patent was granted to Dean, Captain of the "Mermaid," in 1766, and on this tract of land was Fort Ramsey, a Government reserve for defensive purposes; while on June 17th, 1767, a grant of 1,300 acres of land was given to Felix O'Hara and John McCord, the patent bearing the signature of Sir Guy Carleton. Through the courtesy of Mr. F. Richmond I was able to see the original document. O'Hara is said to have been a lieutenant in the British navy.

Among the early missionaries are the names of Suddard, Cuisack and Arnold. The stone house of the latter still remains, being owned by Dr. Peabody, of New York. With the Episcopalians is the honor of erecting the first place of worship in the Basin. Today comfortable Episcopalian, Wesleyan and Roman Catholic churches represent the religious sentiment of Gaspé. Educational matters are not neglected. Model and Elementary schools, presided over by graduates of McGill and MacDonald Colleges, attend to these matters.

About sixty years ago the road was built for the Government by Messrs. Russell & Sims, and for a quarter of a century Gaspé Basin has held up its head as an incorporated village.

The Gaspé coast has been the scene of numerous ship-wrecks. I interviewed a survivor of the ship "Carrick" from Sligo, Ireland, which was wrecked on Cap de Rosier on May 23rd, 1847.

The passengers were Irish emigrants bound for Quebec. The passage had been rough and uncomfortable, and the ship was twenty-three days out when in a blinding snow-storm the Captain got astray, and at two o'clock in the morning the vessel struck the rock. Glad that the cold, disagreeable day was over, the passengers had retired to rest, when a tremendous shock ensued, and the good ship quivered like a living creature. The vessel was within seventy-five or one hundred feet of the beach. She was lying on an even keel with set sails. Even though the spars were cut, she turned over on her side and one stroke of the angry waves swept her clean.

Only seventeen or eighteen persons, including the crew, were saved—reaching the shore by means of ropes. Numbers were drowned trying to escape; the children were found the next morning in the berths.

Amongst the emigrants were the Crummeys—father, mother and seven children. Little Bridget, twelve years old, ran upon deck with the other terrified people, but how dreadful the sight which met her eyes. Ere long the ship parted in the middle, precipitating many persons into the icy waters, screaming for the help which none could give. Hastily the Crummeys' little ones were distributed among their elders. A boy of six years clung to his father, one of eight to his mother; the elder sister clasped the baby, while Bridget held tightly to her three-year-old sister. Alas!