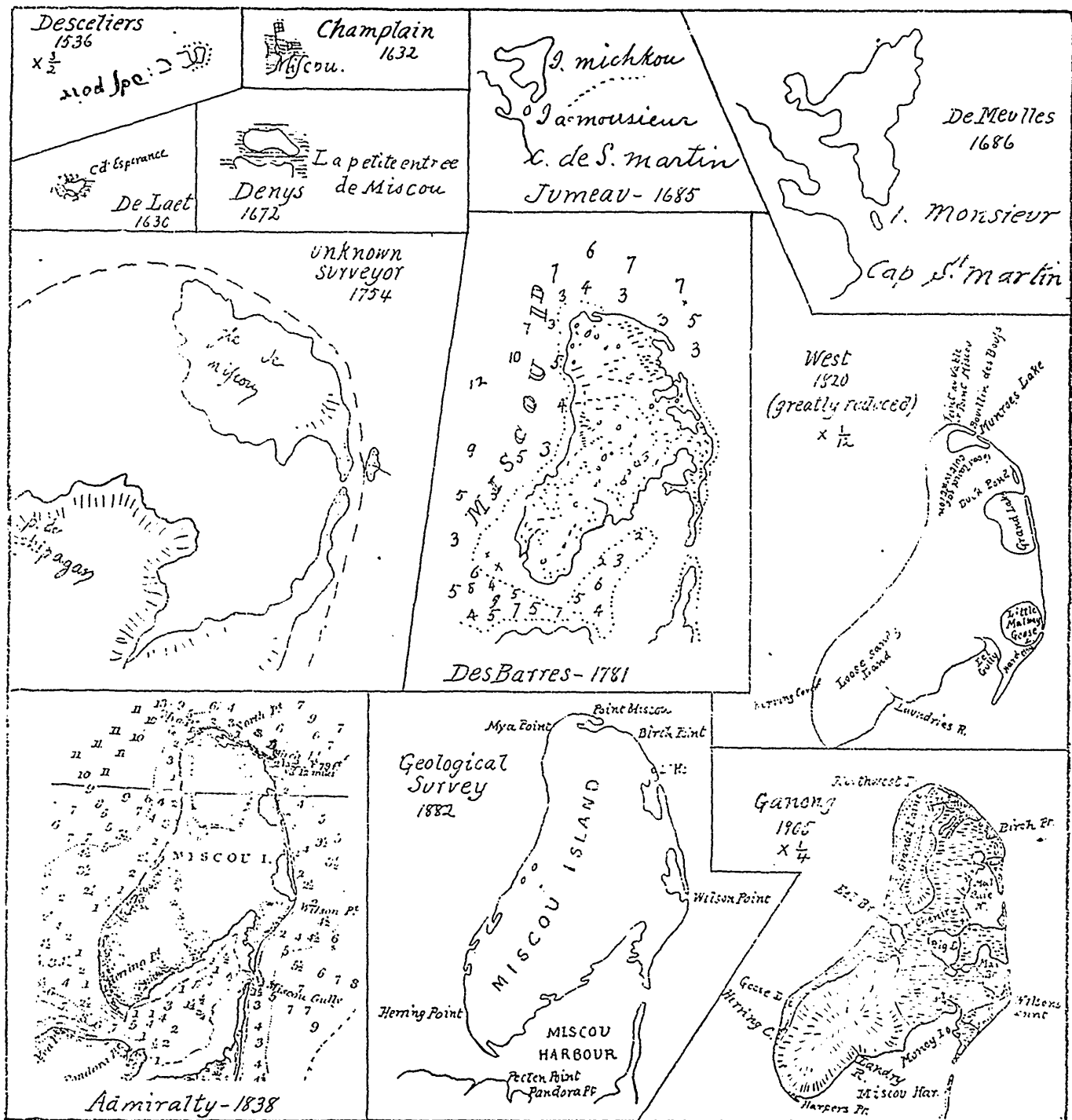


A HISTORY OF MISCOU

BY

W. F. GANONG.

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LEADING MAPS OF MISCOU, 1536-1905

## The History of Miscou.

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IN this paper I aim to present an outline of the history of Miscou, with especial emphasis upon the founding of its present settlement. The earlier events, interesting though these be, I shall touch but lightly, since I seek rather to show how the Miscou of to-day came to be and the part it has had in the building of New Brunswick. But I shall try throughout to make mention of every document, paper, or book, having matter about Miscou, so that the reader, if he will, may find and read for himself the original documents: and these I can commend, from a depth of experience, as far more interesting, realistic and satisfying than any compilation can possibly be. These various publications may be seen at any large library, as for example the St. John Public Library. As to this outline, I warn the reader that I seek not to entertain, but to instruct him, and therefore I have no concern save to set down clearly that which I believe to be true. I hope the reader, like myself, agrees with our early voyager Smethurst in "preferring simple truths before the embellishments and colourings of the best writers."

This is the first of a series of papers planned to cover important New Brunswick settlements of which the history is yet largely or wholly unwritten. In following numbers of this magazine I hope thus to consider Shippegan, Caraquet, Pokemouche, Tracadie, Tabusintac, Burnt Church and Neguac, Bay du Vin

and Escuminac, Richibucto, Buctouche, Cocagne, Shediac, and other important places.

Miscou;—ever to me an island of charm. For I find it goodly in clime and fair to see; storied of old and ancient to-day; strange in form and forever in change; haunt of wild life and home of kind men; our Ultima Thule, great for the student and seeker of rest.

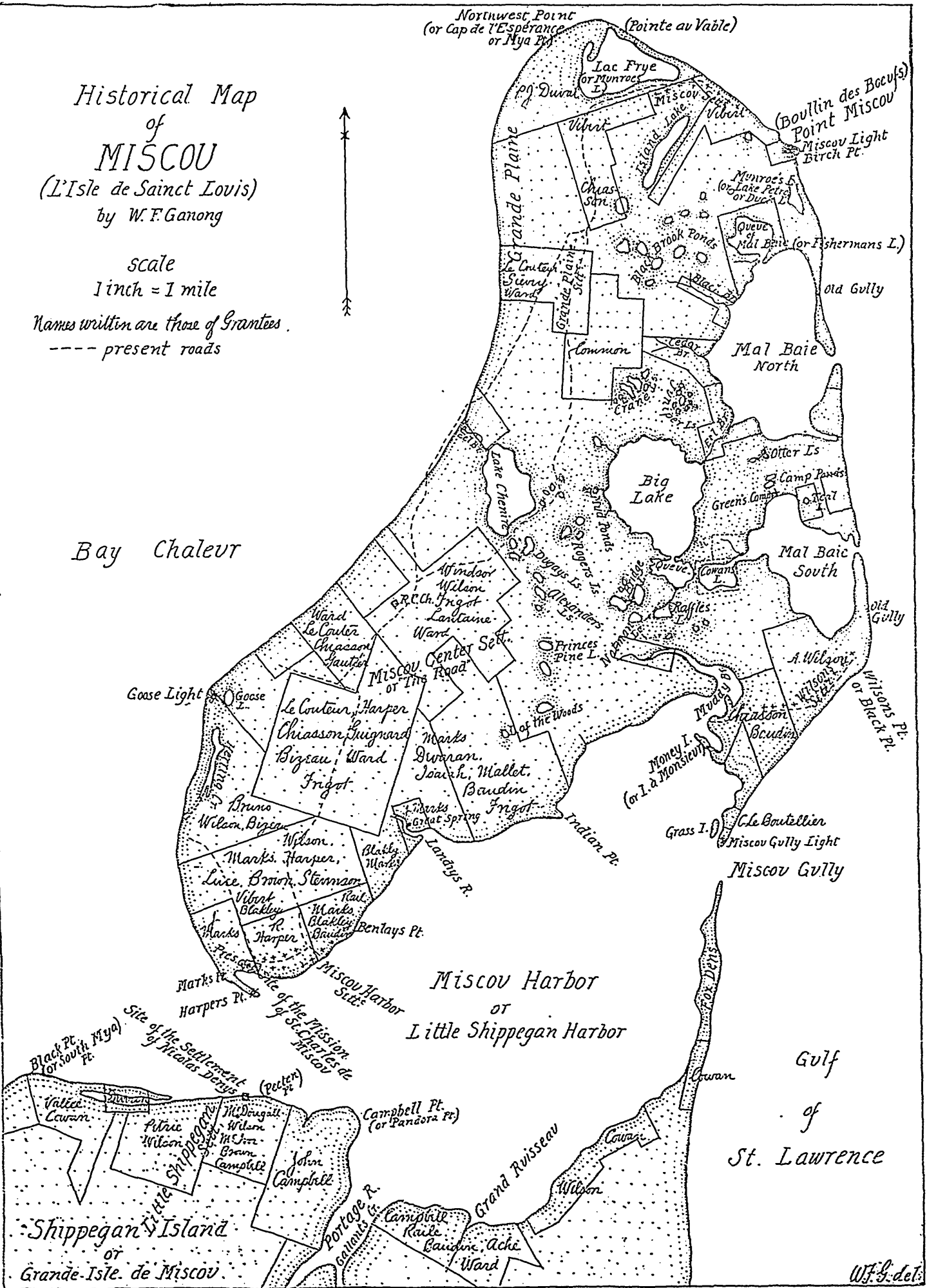
And first, what manner of place is Miscou? As a map will show, New Brunswick extends a long angle northeasterly into the sea, and, as it dips beneath the waves, Miscou is the last above the surface. It consists of some low swells of wooded upland joined together by broad sand beaches enclosing great moors or barrens and many lakes and salt lagoons. The island is slowly sinking beneath the sea, which is eating away the upland, while the beaches are advancing landward over barren and meadow. Only in one place is the island growing, and that is at Grande Plaine where a wide beach-plain is forming down the coast. The settlers farm the uplands, have fishing houses and canning factories on the beaches, and shoot great numbers of water-fowl on the lakes and lagoons. But long ago the beaches yielded greater game, for the sea-cow or walrus came to Grande Plaine in great numbers and were killed for their oil and ivory, as their bleaching bones to this day bear witness. Around the island are rich fisheries, and between it and Shippegan is a safe deep harbor, ample for the shelter of the largest fishing fleet.

But this is all I have space to say of Miscou the place. If the reader cares to learn more of its striking physical geography, he will find a full account, which I have given, with illustrative maps in the *Bulletin of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick*, published at St. John. Volume V, pages 449-464 and 434, while the walrus-bones at Grande Plaine with their history are described in the same *Bulletin*, V. 240-241

Historical Map  
of  
**MISCOU**  
(L'Isle de Saint Louis)  
by W. F. Ganong

scale  
1 inch = 1 mile

Names written are those of Grantees.  
--- present roads



W.F.G. det.

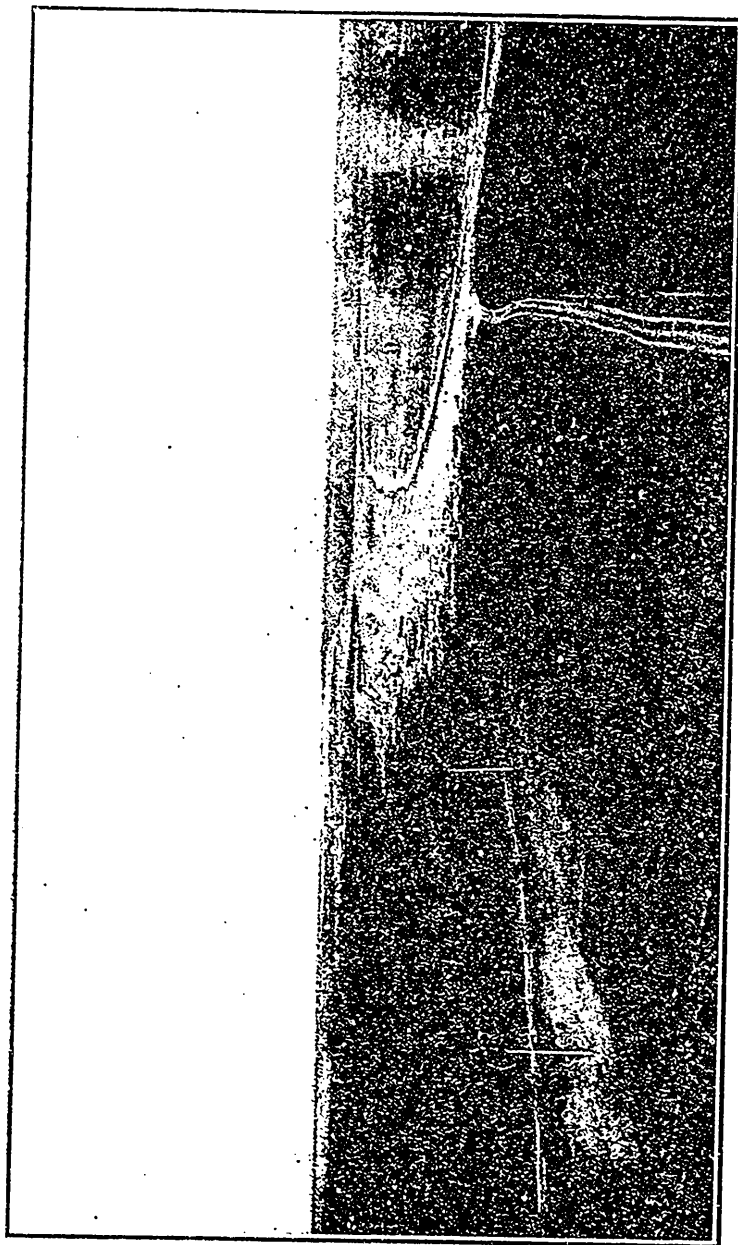
and 464-466. It happens too that the vegetation of Grande Plaine is of unusual scientific interest, and I have given a full description thereof, with photographs and maps, in an article which will be published in a botanical magazine, the *Botanical Gazette*, in July or soon after.

Now what of the men who first knew Miscou? They were of course the Micmac Indians, who in the early settlement of the country resorted here in large numbers, as they must have done for ages before. They sought no doubt the sea-fish, water-fowl, walrus and seals, then so abundant. Probably they came to the Island only in summer, for while camp-sites are known at Money Island, Indian Point and at two or three other places, no village site or burial place indicating permanent occupation is known. The Jesuit missionaries, in their wonderful "Relations," to be described below, tell us much of the religious experiences of these Indians during their first conversion to Christianity. Men still living remember when Indian wigwams by the dozen arose every summer on Money Island, while their owners hunted the many seals at Miscou Gully. But the Indians have long since vanished, and all that we know of them is summarized in these few lines. Yet they have left one memorial which will last as long as the speech of the Canadian people, the name Miscou itself. This word, which occurs nowhere else in the world, is, I believe, Micmac Indian, meaning low or wet ground, in description of the bog-barrens which make up full a half of the Island. The few fragments more that we know of the Indian occupation of Miscou may be found in a publication often mentioned in the following pages, the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*. The Indian notes are in Volume V, 1899, ii, page 232, and (especially) in Volume XII, ii, in an article of mine soon to be published upon the Indian Period, where also the name Miscou is more fully discussed

along with the other local place-names of the Island.

And what white explorer first saw Miscou? Happily we know well, or at least the one who first tells us of it. It was in that period when all the great nations of Europe vied with one another in exploring the newly-discovered world, and in seeking a western passage to the riches of India. And it was the great French navigator, Jacques Cartier, who, on July 3, 1534, now nearing four centuries ago, coasted northward along Miscou and rounded its northern point. Seeing before him a great open bay he hoped he had found a passage to the west, and he named the point, the present Northwest Point, *Capt d'Esperance*, the Cape of Hope. This was the first name applied by any European, so far as we know, to any part of New Brunswick. What a pity it has not survived to our own day! But he named also Bay Chaleur because of the heat he experienced there on July 9th, and this name does exist to-day, the most venerable European word connected with New Brunswick.

A period of exploration is followed ever by a time of exploitation, when the attempt is made to develop the resources of the new country. Thus at Miscou opened the period of the French traders. For the earlier part of this time at Miscou we have no records, but there can be no doubt that soon after Cartier's voyage the French fishermen and traders began to use the fine harbor of Miscou, where, I believe, goodly fleets of little vessels could be seen every summer. It was some of these fishermen no doubt who related to the great Champlain the story of the Gougou, a strange and horrible monster having its home in an island which seems to have been Miscou. But we come to sober history in 1623 when, as the records tell us, one Raymond de la Raide, first resident of Miscou whose name has been preserved, established a trading post there in which some of his men spent a winter. This post, I believe, for reasons given in a



View over Miscou Point looking northward from the lighthouse at Birch Point. A very characteristic Miscou view, showing the low cultivated upland in the foreground, the margin of a great barren on the left, the broad beach with lobster factories and boats in the center, and the scattered settlement of Miscou Point in the distance. [Photo by the author, Aug., 1905].



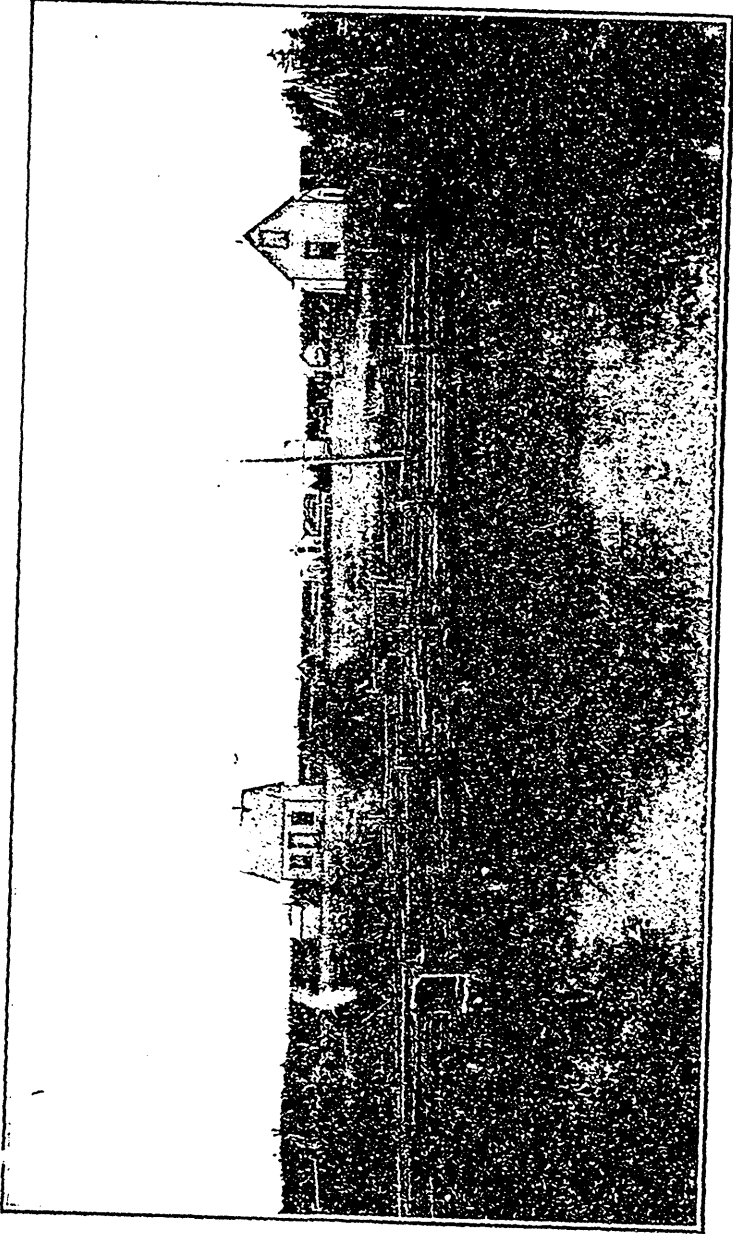
work cited below, stood upon Money Island, (or I. a Monsieur of early maps), and gave origin to the many relics still found there. Not long after, in 1634, the Jesuit Missionaries, burning with zeal for the conversion of the Indians, established at Miscou a mission, which they named St. Charles, while the island itself they called St. Louis. For some years this mission, serving both French and Indians, flourished well, but in 1662 it was abandoned. We know a good deal about it, for the missionaries wrote to their superiors long accounts of their doings, and these were later printed where all may read them, as I shall presently mention. Now the site of the Mission of St. Charles is, I believe, certainly known. It stood on Miscou in a charming situation near the present village of Miscou Harbor. The cellar of the Mission church can still be seen in the same field with the little Protestant church, and behind this latter is an uncleared place said traditionally, and I have no question correctly, to be the old French burial ground. This is one of the chief historic sites of New Brunswick, the place which saw the most important early Christian mission in New Brunswick.

But another important establishment soon followed. In 1652 Nicholas Denys, Governor and Proprietor of all the lands from Cape Breton to Gaspé, established here a trading post and made him a pleasant garden, as he tells us himself in his valuable book, *Histoire de l'Amérique septentrionale*, published at Paris in 1672. I am sorry I cannot take space to repeat the many interesting things he says, nor yet his description of the harbor and his settlement; but he makes it plain that his "habitation" stood on the south side of the harbor at a place where an "old French fort" is still well known and the traces of which may yet be seen though now it is almost wholly washed away. Probably from 1620 until 1670 Miscou Harbor was an important center of trade and fishery, with

a considerable permanent population. After Denys there is a gap in the records until 1719 when Miscou was granted in Seigniorship to the Count St. Pierre, though in 1730 the grant was revoked. It was a company formed by St. Pierre, very likely, which prosecuted the sea-cow fishery at Grande Plaine, and founded the ancient settlement there of which traces have been found in recent times.

If the reader would know more of the events and men of this period, or would read for himself the original records, he may find them in the following places. First of all there is a very interesting and valuable detailed monograph of the history of Miscou through this period, entitled, "Miscou, Hommes de Mer et Hommes de Dieu," by Dr. N. E. Dionne, now librarian of the Legislature of Quebec. It was published in the Magazine *Le Canada Francais* (Quebec), Vol. II., 1889, pages 432-477 and 514-531. The Relations of the Jesuit Missionaries have been printed and translated in a superb edition of 73 volumes, edited by R. G. Thwaites, and a copy of this great work is in the St. John Public Library; the many parts concerning Miscou may be found through the index. Champlain's narratives, and Denys' History of 1672 are extremely rare and costly books, but the important parts of them are printed in Dionne's article above cited. The evidence as to the sites of the various settlements, and further details about them, are to be found in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Vol. V, 1899, ii, 296-299 and 310, and in Vol. XII, 1906, ii, in my article upon the Acadian Period. Cartier's own narrative of his explorations is translated in Hay's *Canadian History Readings*, published at St. John, 1900, pages 9-14.

So passes the period of the French Missions and Trading Establishments. There follows a gap in the historical records, but we cannot doubt that many traders and fishermen continued to frequent the har-



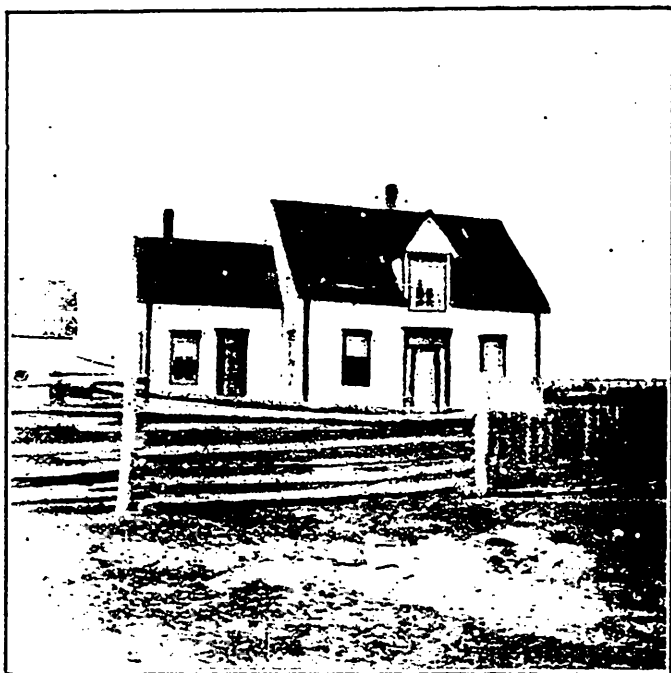
The Settlement of Grande Plaine, Miscou, looking south. It stands on or near the site of an ancient establishment for the walrus fishery, and represents a typical Miscou settlement of the present day. [Photo by the author, Aug., 1905].

bor, at least in summer. Later there came a time of turmoil when England and France were contending for the possession of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and for all Canada; and during those troublous times, from 1755 to 1761, Miscou was probably abandoned by the French as unsafe from attack by their more powerful foe. But in 1763 the country passed to England, and in 1764 the exiled Acadians were once more permitted to settle this country. Then, apparently about 1770, entered the Acadians, though at first but temporarily, into the history of Miscou. There are church records which show that in 1773 there lived at Miscou the Acadian families Doucet, Haché, Arseneau, Boudreault, Chiasson, LeBlanc, and (in 1777) Lavigne, and it is known that also there was a Landry. These men came mostly from Prince Edward Island where their families had long been established. Among them were Alexis Landry and Pierre Doucet, who are said to have lived on opposite sides of Landry River, whence they later (about 1780) removed, Landry to become the founder of Upper Caraquet, Doucet to become a founder of Bathurst. The residence of the others I have not learned, but it is likely that some of them lived later at Grande Plaine of Miscou Point to aid in the fishery carried on in 1775 by two men, Frye and Urquhart, of Gaspé. It was probably the operations of this firm which completed the extermination of the walrus at Grande Plaine. But wherever the residence of these Acadians it seems plain that they were but temporary residents, hunters and fishermen rather than farmers, and that they all removed to join their fellow countrymen in the growing Acadian settlements at Caraquet and elsewhere. After them came other temporary residents, especially one Burnt or Burnet and one James De Coucy (pronounced Cow-sey), both of whom are said to have lived at Landry River. A tradition affirms that De Coucy pretended to the Indians that he had a

grant of the entire island and hence was entitled to half the produce of their chase, which he compelled them to pay. The story of the grant has this much justification, that upon an early map of the island there is marked a "License of occupation to James Cosey, June 30, 1825," covering the tract at Miscou Harbor later granted to John Marks. But these men also vanished, whither I know not, and about 1810 the island lay fallow for settlement. This began about 1815 in a manner soon to be related.

The records for this part of Miscou History are very scanty, consisting only of some fragments of church registers of which copies were given me by Rev. Jos. A. L'Archeveque of Cocagne, some notes in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Vol. X, 1904, ii, 150, and an article by M. Placide Gaudet in *Le Moniteur Acadien* in 1882. For the rest I give the traditions related to me by the older residents of Miscou. But I have no question that we will know much more of the Acadian families above mentioned, their origin and their later residences, when Mr. Gaudet publishes his detailed and invaluable researches into the genealogy of the Acadian families, a work expected to appear under the auspices of the Canadian Government.

We come now to the founding of the present settlement of Miscou. All that has gone before was vain and of no effect so far as the Miscou of to-day is concerned. Explorer, Indian Trader, Missionary, Walrus-hunter, Acadian rover,—all played their little parts and passed along leaving hardly more trace than do the figures of a dream. A few records in rare or learned books, a few traditions in the minds of the older men, some curious names of places, a few disappearing ruins, this is all that remains of events of nearly three centuries span. The Miscou of to-day was founded anew. It is less than a century old. It owes its existence to the gradual expansion of the



A MISCOU HOUSE [English].



A MISCOU' HOUSE [French].

English and Acadian population of the country, spreading from more populous centres and joined by adventurous spirits from many sources.

This present period begins with a record in M'Gregor's *British America*, published in Edinburgh in 1832, (Vol. II, 276), in which he says that he visited Miscou in 1819, and that there was then upon it but a single family, that of a disbanded Highland soldier named Campbell. This man, John Campbell, is universally recognized by local tradition as the first of the modern settlers of Miscou Harbor. He is also known to have been a soldier, and Mr. James Harper, of Miscou, to whom I am indebted for much information as well as many kindly courtesies, tells me he was a 42nd Highlander. The records in the Crown Land Office, however, show that he was not, as were several of the men of this regiment who helped to settle other North Shore Settlements of New Brunswick, (notably Tabusintac and Tracadie), one of the men of that regiment assigned lands on the Nashwaak at the close of the Revolution, and I have been told that he lived first in Quebec. The tradition is that he with one McLaughlin, another early settler, were on the way from Quebec to Nova Scotia, where Campbell had relatives, in the ship *Hibernia*, which had to put into Miscou Harbor because of a storm. These two men liked so well the appearance of the place that they resolved to settle there, and did so. I have not been able to ascertain the date of their arrival, but it was certainly some time prior to 1819 as earlier noted. Campbell was soon joined by Duncan McCall who was, or became, his son-in-law, and was also living there in 1819. It was this McCall and his wife, with their children who were drowned from a canoe as related by M'Gregor, not, however, as he affirms, while on the way to Caraquet, but while crossing the mouth of Portage River. Such is the account locally, where

the incident is still well known. Mr. Andrew Wilson remembers Campbell, as a fine type of an able and somewhat testy Gaelic soldier. Though apparently first resident on Miscou island, he took up land on the south side of the Harbor as shown on the map, and his descendants are numerous about Miscou Harbor. McLaughlin settled not far away, but his descendants later removed to Miramichi. The next English settler to arrive was Robert Harper, a lowland Scotchman, who came apparently in 1825, for in that year he was given license to occupy the land later granted to him near the site of the old Jesuit Mission. Harper had been a marine or man-of-war's man with Nelson at Trafalgar, and tradition says he was one of the boat's crew which rowed the body of Nelson ashore. Later, receiving 200 acres of land in lieu of a pension, he took up his residence at Miscou, though I have not been able to find what first brought him to this place. Possibly, like others before and since, he had visited the harbor while on a vessel (he is said to have served on a Newfoundland brig, the Princess Royal), and saw and liked the place. Soon after Harper, possibly in the same or the next year, there came another important early settler, John Marks (the name said originally to have been Mirk), who had emigrated from Glasgow to Miramichi, lost his all in the great fire in 1825, went for a short time to Carquet and then settled at Miscou, taking up the lands as shown on the map, especially the large grant near the old Mission, which had previously been reserved for James Cosay (or De Cosay). Soon after him came another Trafalgar man-of-war's man, Thomas Cowan, who seems to have settled near Campbell at Little Shippegan. These three men, Harper, Marks and Cowan, as well as McCall earlier mentioned, all married daughters of John Campbell, and their descendants, especially those of Harper and Marks are





A MISCOU FAMILY (English).



A MISCOU FAMILY (French).

numerous and influential residents of Miscou to-day.

A few years later, in 1827 or 1828, came another of the principal founders of Miscou, Andrew Wilson. His case illustrates so well the career of many of the founders of New Brunswick that it is worth relating in some detail. As told me by his sons Andrew and Joseph, both still living at an advanced age at Miscou, Andrew Wilson was a shoemaker at Aberdeen, Scotland, and, having invested his savings in some commercial venture connected with the war of 1812, lost all. His attention being thus turned to America, he resolved to come out himself, and he emigrated no doubt in one of the timber-ships, to Miramichi. Finding it very hard in this new country to make a living by his trade, and hearing that Caraquet was a growing place he went there, apparently in 1823, but again found he could not live by his trade, and he had to turn to other occupations. Among other things he found an opportunity to go to Miscou to help cut the wild hay which grew abundantly at Mal Baie. He succeeded so well with this that finally he concluded to go there to live and raise cattle; and accordingly he moved to the island in 1827 or 1828 and took up lands at Black Point as shown on the map. He prospered and had several sons and daughters, most of whom settled at Miscou where they and their descendants still live. They form a large settlement by themselves at Wilsons Point, as well as an important part of the population elsewhere around Miscou Harbor. To two of his children, Joseph and Andrew Wilson, now aged, but well-informed men, I am indebted for much of the information in this paper.

Such were the real founders of Miscou, at least of its English part, and it is interesting to note that of all the settlements of the North Shore of New Brunswick, this one alone owes the inauguration of its permanent settlement to the English rather than to the French. For some years these families were the only

*English residents, and indeed Perley's Census of the Island in 1849. (mentioned below) gives no other English names at Miscou Harbor, though probably some of the other English residents at Little Shippegan, including Donald McIvor (from the Highlands of Scotland via Nova Scotia and Tabusintac), had arrived before. Gradually, however, other English residents, attracted by the opportunities for fishing or for trade or to live near relatives or for other reasons large or small, settled at the Harbor. Their names occur among the grantees on the map though some of the grantees have left no descendants on Miscou. Of the families still here the principal were Brown, early (1815?) from Ireland, Windsor, early (1818?) from Scotland, Blakley recently (1870?) from Nova Scotia, McDougall (1865?) from P. E. Island, Baudin (1875?) from Quebec, while Luce from Jersey, Petrie from Ireland and others of the remaining grantees have left no descendants at Miscou. Among the prominent settlers is John Brune, keeper of the Goose Light; he was by birth a Russian, who early went to sea, and, sailing from port to port, came on a fishing voyage to the Gulf of St. Lawrence; he entered Miscou Harbor for bait, met there the Miss Wilson whom he afterwards married and concluded to settle with her people. His case illustrates another of the ways in which these remote parts of New Brunswick have received their population.*

But in the meantime other settlements, partly of Acadians and partly of Jerseymen have been forming at the northern end of the island. The walrus-fishery of Grande Plaine was of course long since extinct, but Miscou Point and vicinity formed a good station for the shore-fishery, which still flourishes. Its settlement for this purpose began, so far as records show, about 1830, at which time Peter John Duval, one of those Jersey merchants, who, from the earliest settlement of the country, had monopolized the fishing



A MISCOU FAMILY (English).



A MISCOU FAMILY (French).

and trading of this region, established a fishery at Miscou Point and obtained a grant of the North end of the Island. Here he established fishing buildings, and an old plan in the Crown Land office shows, both at Northwest Point (just to the westward), and also north of the present lighthouse. Connected in some way with him, perhaps as agent or manager was a Jerseyman, John Godfrey, whose name also appears in the old plans. It was to aid in the fisheries, without doubt, that Duval and Godfrey brought here the Jerseymen John LeCouteur, Captain George Syvret (now Sievry), and John Vibert, who became the ancestors of some of the most prominent families of Miscou. These Jerseymen, of whom there are many others at Shippegan, Caraquet, Bathurst and elsewhere, were chiefly Protestants and of a character which has made them an exceedingly valuable element in the New Brunswick population. At about the same time various other settlers came to this port of Miscou, George Brown from Ireland, who left descendants at Miscou, with Plaw, Burns, Hay and Dupuits who have left no descendants. Acadians also joined the settlement including Chiasson from Prince Edward Island, Bizeau from Quebec, Ward from Gaspé (the original Ward had served in the Revolution, settled in Gaspé married a Frenchwoman and left many descendants wholly French), all of whom now have many descendants on Miscou, and one Mitotte who disappeared. And at Lac Frye, as Moses Perley tells us in his valuable Report on the Island in 1849, there lived a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, Louis Gautier, whose descendants, their name corrupted often to Gorky, are still at Miscou. This Report of Moses Perley's, published in a Report on the Fisheries of New Brunswick at Fredericton in 1850, is the most valuable work of this period on Miscou, giving as it does a complete census of the island and much infor-

mation about its history, settlers and business. Of these settlers a part, including LeCouteur, Syvret Ward and Ohiasson, were no doubt attached to Duval's station at Northwest Point and settled at Grande Plaine, where their descendants still live, while the others were settled to the eastward towards Birch Point. But Duval's ventures did not prosper, and the fisheries of the north end of the island underwent various changes and vicissitudes, while the residents turned to farming as well as fishing. Those at Grande Plaine, where there is a large body of good upland soil, made fair farms which their descendants cultivate to-day. But at Miscou Point there is little upland, so that no expansion was there possible. Moreover when the land was cleared, especially after the building of the lighthouse at Birch Point, the settlers began to suffer greatly from scarcity of fuel. Accordingly after 1860 several of the families from Miscou Point, removed thence and took up farms along the new road then being opened through the considerable body of good upland in the southwestern part of the island. Their places were later taken by a few other English families, which made the Miscou Point settlement practically English. But the opening of this road inaugurates another, and the final chapter in the history of the founding of Miscou.

Prior to about 1860 all the settlers of Miscou located themselves on the coast as a matter of course, leaving the interior unsettled. I have not found when the road was first opened, but it is said that the first settler in the interior was one Victor Frierly a French man-of-warsman (he has left no descendants), who soon after was joined by Michel Frigot, from Caraque. Thereafter the settlement along the road developed somewhat rapidly, the farms being taken by families named Ward, LeCouteur, Chaisson, Bizcau, and Gautier from the North end of the Island, in part removals from Miscou Point, and in part the natural



MISCOU CHILDREN.



MISCOU CHILDREN.

expansion of the families at Grande Plaine, while others were taken by Lantain, Frigot, Dugay, Mallie, and others, expanding from the rapidly-growing settlement of Caraquet, or elsewhere. Some of these however, settled elsewhere on Miscou. This settlement at Miscou Center, or as it is locally called "the road," was greatly promoted by the establishment here of a Free Grants tract about 1878 which was rapidly taken up. Miscou Center is thus a new, but is a fairly prosperous settlement, maintaining a large church with its own priest. It is, however, approaching the limit of its growth, for nearly all of the cultivable land has been taken up, here as elsewhere on the island. Indeed the lines of the grants shown on the accompanying map cover practically every acre of the arable land on the island, and even more; for those grants shown without name of grantees are not farms but blocks taken up to cover marshes producing only wild hay. All of the remainder of the island is of bog-barren, sand beach or marsh. Miscou is therefore now nearly all settled, and probably never will maintain a much larger population than the 400 or 500 residents of the present.

Such was the founding of the settlements of Miscou. The limits of my space will not allow me to attempt any sketch of its later development, which is perhaps just as well since my knowledge is limited and the matter is uneventful. The expansion of the settlements, the building of light-houses, the development of lobster-factories, the construction of churches, the improvement of communication through the building of roads and a wharf, and the proposed steamer service to Caraquet, are the chief later interests at Miscou. To this I wish I could add an improvement in education, for in this the island is sadly backward. As the settlements become older, the two races intermingle somewhat, though it is still true that the settlers of Miscou Harbor, extending to Goose Lake,



Wilson's Point and Miscou Point are still largely English, while those of Miscou Center and Grande Plaine are almost entirely French. The French are increasing faster than the English, and it seems that in time, as is happening everywhere along our North Shore, the French must possess the land. Thus is fate working revenges, and so are the French coming again into their own.

And what of the Miscou man? His environment has made him a fisherman who farms a little in the intervals. His occupation and smallness of opportunity have kept him backward and poor. His remoteness and poverty have kept him from learning and from knowledge of the world. But though circumstances have thus been hard for him, he has in one way risen above them, for I have found him always, whether English or French, French-English or English-French, always content, healthy, kindly and hospitable.

W. F. GANONG.