

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

Introduction

The name Sunny Bank was originally given to a post office established in 1899 in the home of John E. Mullin, located about a kilometre (a half mile) east of the Mill Brook. This post office soon moved to the home of George Patterson currently 19 Sunny Bank Street. Forty years later another new post office, called Brassett, began serving those residents who lived east of the Mill Brook. Sunny Bank was then the address used exclusively by people of York living west of Mill Brook.

The post office closed in 1967 but the name continued to be used, though it passed near extinction when the Town of Gaspé named its streets in about 1975. With the help of a petition signed by about 75 residents, I managed to have name Sunny Bank Street used. Like so many of Sunny Bank's unique features, its meaning is somewhat changed, but the name is immortalized, as a street about two kilometres long.

Assembling this history of Sunny Bank has brought to light two startling discoveries. Firstly, I marvel at number of minuscule events that unfold, as if pre-planned, to form the "history" of such a small community. The stories recounted on these pages merely scratch the surface of the memories lingering in the minds of Sunny Bank residents. Volumes could be written about the many good and bad times experienced within these small boundaries. Regardless of how mundane, each life is a chronicle of history.

Secondly, it becomes scary when we see how quickly "today" becomes "history." As I read over and re-write these pages, what was recently referred to as now is already very much changed. In the final updating, I discovered that my immediate family had undergone five weddings, one birth and one death since the last draft was completed.

Unlike major cities which manufacture cars or electronic equipment; unlike the vast farmlands which mass produce food; unlike fishing communities which harvest fish from the oceans; Sunny Bank has provided the outside world with only one export: a steady supply of emigrants. People have been leaving in search of jobs and a different life-style since the first settlers raised their families.

By the best projection I have been able to make, over a quarter of a million people have descended from Sunny Bank's early residents. Though the population has never exceeded 250 people, over a thousand members of the eight original Sunny Bank families have been born and raised here. Most of these are included in the Family Charts in the second section of this book. Obviously, the vast majority of these people have relocated elsewhere.

For its size and population Sunny Bank claims an overwhelming number of places of particular interest to the community and surrounding area. Within its boundaries lies a church, a rink, a general store, a garage, a TV Repair Shop, and Quebec's oldest fish hatchery, besides a dozen or so other important establishments which have thrived at times during the past century. The Mill Brook, forming the east boundary, was probably the home of Gaspé's oldest industry other than fishing. According to the diary of Captain Bell, who accompanied General Wolfe in 1759, there was a lumber mill on the brook, erected by the French in the first half of the 18th century.

With the number of well-educated young people presently growing up in Sunny Bank, one would expect this list to grow over the next few generations. However, a couple of problems seem to threaten our community. The area's economic outlook is even less optimistic now than during the past couple of centuries, and the present political difficulties seem to be taking a toll on the English residents of this province. Despite the exodus seen during the past three decades, the very survival of a small pocket of English in Quebec is a testament to the industrious nature of Gaspésians. Fewer than 3000 English are left in the area, but the community spirit is strong enough that hundreds more would be here if they could find employment. Hopefully these pages carry sufficient detail to see that the way of life of our forefathers is not forgotten.

In conclusion I must apologize for two things: 1) not having worked faster for the benefit of those who have already passed on. 2) not being able to continue updating this work for the benefit of those shaping the present, and future, Sunny Bank.

Also, despite repeatedly checking over the information contained herein, there will remain some errors, and unfortunately, some people forgotten. I can only apologize, and assure readers that every effort has been made to ensure accuracy.

...Andrew Patterson
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