

PART I

Chapter 1

"There is no place of worship in Gaspee"

These words, "There is no place of worship in Gaspee", were written by Bishop Charles Inglis on Tuesday, June 2, 1789. They set the scene for the beginning of this story which is to be about the churches that have been built around Gaspé Bay, and particularly about St. Matthew's Church, Peninsula.

If there was "no place of worship", one might think there were no people here in 1789, but a few people were living around the Bay. Bishop Inglis first visited Mr. Felix O'Hara, whom he describes as the principal magistrate of the district. O'Hara lived in what came to be known as Gaspé Basin and is now called the Town of Gaspé. Inglis says in his journal that O'Hara "has resided in this desolate country for 24 years" and was the first British subject that settled in Gaspé. After many years of public service, O'Hara died in 1805, and his tombstone may be seen in the old neglected cemetery near the arena in Gaspé. His sons and their wives and descendants continued to play a prominent part in Gaspé history for several generations.

Bishop Inglis went ashore at Douglastown on June 3. He described it as consisting of about twenty houses of which fifteen were inhabited. He found about seventy acres were cleared around the houses but the only cultivation was of a few potatoes. A Mr. Daniel McPherson, another magistrate, lived in Douglastown but that day was away at "Pierce Island" fishing.

The next day, June 4, the Bishop went ashore on "the East side of Gaspee". This would be the Grande Grève shore. He saw several flakes and stages for curing cod. He called on a Mr. Lemesurier, one of several brothers from Guernsey who traded in fish, who said they generally caught from 10,000 to 20,000 quintals¹ of fish a year and brought over one hundred fishermen from Guernsey for the season. One of their ships arrived from Guernsey that day.

We know from other records that a few people were living on Peninsula Point or the adjacent mainland at that time. Richard Ascah had settled there and his first child born in Gaspé, Robert, was born

1. 1 quintal equals 112 lb.

at the "Port of Gaspey" in 1765. Family tradition states that Robert was the first English child born in Gaspé. The Ascah name will crop up often in this story as the many families which sprang from the original Ascah couple made an outstanding contribution to St. Matthew's Church and community life in Peninsula and elsewhere around the Bay¹.

John Patterson was also in Gaspé by this time. He had taken up land in what is now Sunny Bank but what was to be known for a long time as the South West Arm, and he was to be the ancestor of a very large number of present day Gaspésians. One of his descendants, the late Mr. Raymond Patterson, undertook a study of the Patterson genealogy, and the notes he left at his death have served as a valuable source of inspiration and information for many people interested in local history².

Twelve years before Bishop Inglis' visit (1777), a census was taken listing the names of the heads of families, the number of people in each family, and the number of cattle, boats, servants, etc. The statistics show, in addition to N. LeMessurier from Guernsey, Felix O'Hara from Ireland, John Patterson from Scotland, and Richard Ascah from England, nineteen other men, a number of them from R. Island (Rhode Island?), a few natives, and one or two from each of "N. Foundland", "N. York", and "N. England". In all, sixty-eight people were living around the Bay two hundred years ago.

In the decade after the census was taken, the effects of the American Revolution were felt when a number of United Empire Loyalists arrived to settle on the Gaspé coast, a few of them in Douglstown and at other points on the shores of the Bay. Other settlers trickled in year by year through the last quarter of the eighteenth century, of particular interest to Peninsula being the first Annett, the first Miller, the first Mullin, and the first Coffin.

And who was Bishop Inglis and why was he travelling around these shores in 1789? He was ^{one of} the first ^{of} Bishops of the Church of England to be consecrated to serve outside of England. In the approximately

1. The genealogy of the Ascah family and some further information about its members may be found in "The Ascah Family Genealogy" written by Elmer Ascah.
2. One such person is Andrew Patterson who has compiled genealogical charts and other Patterson family information.

one hundred and fifty years of the history of England's overseas colonies which ended with the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775, no bishop was ever sent to lead the churches established in the new lands. However, by the 1770s great pressure was being exerted by leading people in the Thirteen Colonies for the consecration of a bishop. One way in which the government in England had shown its concern for the spiritual welfare of its people was by having St. Paul's Church, Halifax, constructed at the time that city was established. (The city was founded in 1749 and the church was first used in 1750.) When the Reverend Charles Inglis left the Thirteen Colonies among the thousands of United Empire Loyalists after the Revolution and came to Halifax, the Church in England made the decision to set up as a diocese of the Church of England the remaining British North American colonies which then comprised roughly the St. Lawrence valley, the Maritime Provinces, Newfoundland and Bermuda. This diocese was to be known as the Diocese of Nova Scotia, and Charles Inglis was to be the bishop of this vast area. He went to England and was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury on August 12, 1787¹. When he came to Gaspé, he was en route to Quebec to pay a visit to the chief centre in the western part of his diocese.

As the Church of England was supported by the government in England, changes in policy and financial backing for new undertakings could be obtained through requests to both the church authorities and the government. In addition, there existed two great missionary societies which had been formed in England for the express purpose of helping the churches in the overseas colonies. The first, founded in 1698, was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, more often known as the S.P.C.K. Its aim was to provide Christian education and Christian literature. It supplied books and funds for educational literature in all the faraway corners of the world where they were needed. Several of the books in the library of St. Matthew's Church, Peninsula, were supplied by the S.P.C.K. nearly two hundred years after its founding.

The other great missionary society was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, known usually as the S.P.G. It was founded to send clergy to work among the settlers in the colonies. From the time of its founding in 1701, thousands of young

1. In 1784, Dr. Samuel Seabury^{of Connecticut} was consecrated bishop, not by the Archbishop of Canterbury but by three bishops^{of Aberdeen} of the Scottish Episcopal Church. In February 1787, the Archbishop of Canterbury consecrated ~~Bishops~~^{Bishops} ~~Whit~~^{in London} a bishop for each of the two states, Pennsylvania and New York. Bishop Charles Inglis was the next overseas bishop to receive consecration.

men were chosen and sent out as missionaries by the S.P.G. which paid their salaries. Most of the first clergymen who came to work in Gaspé were paid by the S.P.G. The daughter of one of the earliest clergymen in Gaspé, tells in her memoirs that when her father, the Reverend William Arnold, died, her mother received a pension from the S.P.G., as did she herself until she was twenty-one¹. It is impossible to exaggerate the influence this Society had on the moral and social development of Canada and other parts of the British Empire. As the missionaries were required to keep in touch with the Society and send annual reports on their work, and as these letters and reports were preserved, the S.P.G. records are a wonderful source of history. I have been able to make some use of the S.P.G. files through the help of friends.

Bishop Inglis' long journey from Halifax to Quebec taken in the Royal Navy frigate "Dido" convinced him to recommend strongly that another bishop and more clergy be provided in his huge diocese. In 1793, Dr. Jacob Mountain, a clergyman of Norfolk, England, of Huguenot descent, was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury as Bishop of the Diocese of Quebec. This diocese was erected out of Bishop Inglis' diocese and included all of Upper and Lower Canada, which, of course, included Gaspé. In the Cathedral in Quebec, the register of baptisms, marriages, and burials for the year 1806 shows that William Annett, aged 27, and George Annett, aged 25, both fishermen of the District of Gaspé, were baptized there on September 28 by the officiating minister, Salter Jehosophat Mountain, a nephew of Bishop Jacob Mountain. Thus the Gaspé people must have sometimes taken advantage of the presence of clergymen in Quebec when they had the opportunity of being in that port in those early days.

From time to time in the years before Bishop Mountain's appointment, requests were made by various people for the appointment of a clergyman in Gaspé. For example, a petition to Sir Guy Carleton² in March of 1773 concerning the fisheries and signed by Felix O'Hara and others states:

"The want of a Protestant clergyman is of infinite prejudice to these Colonies, it cannot be described how servicable a Gentleman or two of that character would be....."

1. "Remembrance" by Edith B. Mills
2. Public Archives of Canada, MG23, A1, Vol. 9, No. 2304

In 1785, Captain Nicholas Cox, Lieutenant-Governor of Gaspé, drew the attention of the settlers to disorder on Sunday. He urged the heads of families to meet with families on Sunday and let a "discreet, intelligent person" read prayers. He promised to endeavour to secure a clergyman and asked them to fence in the burying grounds.

Chapter 2

Roman Catholic and Church of England Beginnings

In his diary of his Gaspé visit, Bishop Inglis writes when commenting on the population of the area: "(there were) few members of the Church of England among them, the greatest number consisting of Papists and Protestant Dissenters". These Papists or Roman Catholics were visited twentytwo years later, in the summer of 1811, by a bishop, Monseigneur Joseph Octave Plessis, who had an account kept of his journey.¹ The writer tells of Bishop Plessis' visit to the three little Roman Catholic chapels which had been erected in the years prior to this at Point St. Peter, St. George's Cove and Douglastown. The Bishop's account mentions particularly Mr. Alban Bond of Point St. Peter, Mr. Aug. Lehoullier of St. George's Cove, and Messrs. Thomas and Isaac Kennedy of Douglastown. The Bishop held services in each chapel and in Douglastown he confirmed eight children and eleven adults. The account says that there were about fifteen houses in Douglastown, the community evidently not having grown since Bishop Inglis visited it.

The chapel at St. George's Cove had been built largely by Mr. Lehoullier who himself conducted services every Sunday for the ten Catholic families in the area. This little chapel was dedicated to St. Augustin.

Missionaries had been calling at the little settlements around the coast for some years prior to the visit by Bishop Plessis and continued to do so afterward. An account of the history of the Cassivi family indicates that Antoni Cassivi, coming as a missionary's helper one year, met Angélique O'Connor of one of the Irish families of Grande Grève, married her in 1816, and stayed to found a well known Gaspé family.²

It would be interesting to know exactly when each of the three little churches was erected as they were evidently the very first churches built anywhere around the Bay.³

1. *Revue d'Histoire de la Gaspésie*, Avril-juin, Juillet-sept. 1968

2. *Revue d'Histoire de la Gaspésie*, Vol. III No. 2 and No. 3, Vol. IV No. 1

3. Since writing the above I have been informed that the first chapel in Douglastown was built in 1800.

In the same decade that Bishop Jacob Mountain arrived in Quebec, Douglstown received a new resident in the person of Henry Johnston. He married a daughter of Mr. Daniel McPherson and in 1799 was given a piece of land by Mr. McPherson. He later carried on his father-in-law's fishing business and also became a Justice of the Peace and a prominent citizen. He became greatly concerned about the need for a Protestant clergyman in the Gaspé Bay area and as a result of his concern he wrote a long letter¹ to Bishop Mountain on January 8, 1813. In this letter he gave facts, estimates, and statistics to inform the Bishop about the population, saying for instance, that nine-tenths of the income of the area came from fishing and whaling. By page six of his letter he reached the subject of religion and began this way:

"I will now crave your Lordship's attention to the degraded state of the protestants as such. As in other quarters of the Globe they are the best supporters of Commerce and good faith. They are here also the very life and support of the fisheries. In this north-eastern Division of the District and where three-quarters of the commerce center, there are fifty-six protestant families producing a population of three hundred and thirty-six souls on an average of six to a family, all of whom (a few of the parents excepted) have never looked a regular protestant clergyman in the face. It is true we are occasionally visited by itinerant preachers from the Mother Country who probably might succeed in propogating the Gospel in their way if their character were even at mediocrity. Such is not the case and they are generally turned into ridicule."

He then explained that the magistrates had been performing marriages quite legally according to the civil law but a law recently passed disqualifying anyone but a Church of England or Roman Catholic clergyman from performing marriages was making marriages performed by magistrates illegal. He described baptisms carried out by anyone who could read and burials conducted in the same way in unconsecrated ground.

Johnston's letter put before the Bishop a very earnest plea for clergy and teachers.

The next few years after the time of Johnston's letter mark a turning point in history, both world history and local church history.

1. Archives of the Diocese of Quebec, Church House, Quebec, P.Q.

The Napoleonic Wars came to an end in 1815, releasing thousands of men from military and naval service, and opening a period of nearly a hundred years free of any large scale European war.

One result of the ending of the Napoleonic Wars was the beginning of emigration from the various parts of the British Isles of large numbers of people seeking new homes in the overseas colonies. Gaspé received a share of these new-comers, arrivals continuing through several decades and contributing greatly to development of all aspects of life, including religion, around Gaspé Bay.

In 1819, the S.P.G. sent out a clergyman to the Diocese of Quebec, and Bishop Mountain appointed him to the District of Gaspé. His name was John Suddard. He was a native of Whitehaven, Cumberland, England, and he appears to have brought his wife and family and a brother or two brothers with him.

The Reverend Mr. Suddard had a large "parish", the whole coast from Gaspé to Restigouche in the first two years he was here. In 1821, another clergyman was sent to Percé and parts adjacent, and in succeeding years more clergymen arrived to do the work in such settlements as New Carlisle and Paspébiac.

A little church was built in Gaspé Basin. Whether it was built on Suddard's arrival in the fall of 1819 or in the early part of 1820, I have not been able to ascertain. In his report to the S.P.G dated October 23, 1820, Mr. Suddard states that there were upwards of three hundred inhabitants attached to the Church of England "with a small place built for public worship with the intention of supplanting it by a respectable church". These three hundred inhabitants would be from the settlements all around the Bay.

It is not easy for us, so unfamiliar with anything but highway travel, to picture the sailboats and rowboats arriving at the Basin Point on a Sunday morning with their occupants on their way to church, or the people coming over the ice in winter. I have not found any evidence to suggest that the church was anywhere but approximately where St. Paul's Anglican Church is today. Therefore, most of the church-goers had a long hill to climb after arriving at the point.

Mr. Suddard further states in his report of 1820 that in winter

service is held twice a Sabbath, but in summer while he is away at other stations a layman "gratuitously" reads prayers and a sermon.

This first little church was even more temporary than was planned as a raging forest fire burned it to the ground in June, 1821. Doctor Von Iffland, who came to Gaspé in the summer of that year to vaccinate the citizens and who wrote a lengthy account of the conditions of life he observed here, was in Gaspé Basin when the fire occurred. He wrote:

*"At the beginning of June when it was very warm, and the air very dry, some persons set fire imprudently in various woodlots so as to clear land and the most terrible consequences followed. Fire consumed the woods for a league and a half and burned down five houses; indeed the fire was so violent that it menaced the woods of all the land bordering Gaspé Bay. The Protestant church was burned to the ground four hours after the congregation had met in it for service.... Happily, rain fell the next day and continued to fall for a week."*¹

Just where Mr. Suddard lived is not clear, but in his report of November 8, 1821, he told the S.P.G. that the parsonage would be ready for plastering in the spring. He also noted that after the whale fishing season closed, steps would be taken to start rebuilding the church. In a letter dated July 8, 1822 Suddard writes:

"At Gaspé a temporary church was built last Fall. Now while absent a gentleman named Davis, much respected for the propriety and purity of his conduct, reads the prayers in it each Sunday morning."

Suddard's life, especially in the first two or three years he was in Gaspé, could not have been easy as he had to make such long journeys and yet see to his family and the church in Gaspé as well. He made a tour of the whole Baie de Chaleur coast in 1820, and he wrote in November 1821 about crossing the snow and ice on snowshoes in March of that year to visit Restigouche. Two years later, he wrote that he was sometimes inclined to be doubtful of the good effect of his clerical work when he saw the unfinished state of church and churchyard; but he was then planning to make his usual last round of visits to the out-stations for the year.

1. From Doctor Von Iffland's account "Voyage dans le District de Gaspé": *Revue d'Histoire de la Gaspésie*, Vol. VII, No. 1. Translated by Ken H. Annett

In his 1824 report he informed the Secretary of the S.P.G. that he had drawn on the Society for £200. He could not agree to draw as late as Christmas because he was obliged to get seven month' winter provisions from Quebec in good time before transport closed. He commented that he practised the strictest economy.

The records of baptisms, marriages, etc. Mr. Suddard must have kept in his first four years here have not been found, although he is known to have performed baptisms as one baptismal record signed by him has been seen but the registers of St. Paul's Church from 1823 onward are all preserved. The burial ground used in Mr. Suddard's time and for some years afterward was probably the one already referred to in connection with Felix O'Hara. The most recent tombstone still standing in the remnant of this little cemetery when I visited it about four years ago was dated 1848.

Chapter 3

"La Chapelle de la Cove St. George"

During the years when the Church of England was getting established around Gaspé Bay, another religious denomination was also making a beginning. In 1817, a young man arrived in Indian Cove from Guernsey who was to have an important influence in the area for many years to come. He was Pierre Simon.

Nearly sixty years later, in 1874, the Rev. J. Lawrence, the Methodist minister then resident in this area, wrote a letter in the "Christian Guardian" telling of a visit by the Reverend Doctor Douglas of Montreal. In it he says they drove from Gaspé to Indian Cove by horse and carriage. He continues:

"In this trip we had the pleasure of calling on the oldest Methodist on the coast, the venerable Mr. Simon, of Indian Cove, previously from the Island of Guernsey, who is now over eighty years of age, and who for fifty years previous to the appointment of the first Wesleyan missionary, kept up the interest of Methodism on this coast. He is still hale and hearty, and in the absence of the minister is ever ready in his humble way to work for Jesus and is always punctual to a moment in his attendance upon all religious services."

In little notebooks, Mr. Simon kept records of family and community events, and these notes, today in the possession of his great-grandson, Mr. Irwin Simon, are as legible as when they were written and are an invaluable source of history.

One entry states: "La chapelle de la Cove St. George fut Batie l'annez 1819". Thus the building of Methodist churches around the Bay got started simultaneously with or perhaps a little ahead of the building of Anglican churches.

The little "chapelle de la Cove St. George" was built not far from the Roman Catholic chapel which Bishop Plessis visited in 1811. When Commissioners were sent from Quebec in 1819 to hear land claims in "the Inferior District of Gaspé", a claim for Lot No. 3 in St. George's Cove read as follows:

"74-1/2 acres claimed by Jean LeMesurier and Nicholas Lenfesty. From this lot is excepted in favour of

*Peter LeMesurier a small lot or emplacement (contents not ascertained) as by him actually occupied, also a certain other small lot heretofore used as a burying ground, or cemetery, and reserved as such at the request of the said claimants Jean LeMesurier and Nicholas Lenfesty."*¹

The Commissioners began receiving petitions for land in Douglastown on June 21, 1819. As the above description makes mention only of a cemetery on Lot 3, one must surmise that the chapel was built later in that year. Mr. Simon was treasurer of this little church and in all probability one of the chief builders. He records a number of times that Nicholas Lenfesty was paid for caring for the building. For example:

	£	s	d
1832 May 21 payé a Mr. Nicholas Lenfesty	5	7	3
1835 payé a Mr. Lenfesty pour le soin de chapelle	1	10	0
1839 payé a Mr. Lenfesty pour chauffage de la chapelle St. George	1	10	0

A little cemetery exists in St. George's Cove today containing headstones marking the graves of the early Methodists and, since 1925, United Church people of the area. The remains of the early Catholics must lie nearby, although there are no markers to show their graves. Later the Church of England people also buried their dead in a plot of their own adjoining on the east that of the Methodists. The land for this plot was deeded in 1841 but may have been used before then.

The little Roman Catholic chapel probably existed until about 1841 when a new Roman Catholic Church was built in Indian Cove. The little Methodist Church stood, Mr. Irwin Simon tells me, until 1916 when it was torn down and the lumber in it used by Mr. Alf. Simon to build a house.

In its nearly one hundred years of existence the Methodist chapel saw many unusual events. For example, Dr. Von Iffland tells of the preaching of a fanatic by the name of Hiram Lord who so inflamed the feelings of the Catholics and Methodists that they were destroying each others property in St. George's Cove until he, as a government officer, intervened.

1. Report of the Commissioners Geo. IV Appendix (E)

Probably no more memorable gathering took place during the early decades of the church than occurred on August 24, 1824. On this day Archdeacon George Jehosophat Mountain came to the little settlement.

Archdeacon Mountain was the son of Bishop Jacob Mountain who was unable to make the journey himself to Gaspé and sent his archdeacon in his place. The law at that time being that only Church of England and Roman Catholic clergymen could marry and baptize, the Methodists looked to the Church of England for such services. It had evidently been arranged beforehand that Archdeacon Mountain, when he arrived in the Bay from Quebec (he was travelling in the schooner "Two Brothers"), would call at St. George's Cove to perform some baptisms. The Archdeacon kept a journal ¹ of his trip and records in detail his experiences on that August afternoon. After describing the fields ("they have some patches of grain and potatoes and their hay harvest is in progress"), and homes, and mentioning the two little churches, he continues:

"...finding that I spoke French, and said grace in that language, and that I was furnished with a French copy of the liturgy in preparation for the christenings (the Church of England in England had had the Prayer Book translated into French soon after the revision in 1662 for use in the Channel Islands) which I was to perform, they conveyed a request through their preacher that I should hold service and preach to them in French."

As he had never preached in French and never held a service in a Methodist Church, Archdeacon Mountain had misgivings about doing either and especially both at once. However, he decided he would grant the request of the French-speaking Guernsey and Jersey people and he held the desired service after he had performed the baptisms and visited two houses. He says, "the little chapel was well filled" and "I succeeded sufficiently well to prevent my being confused or guilty of hesitation".

Bishop Plessis had had an experience similar to Archdeacon Mountain's when he visited Point St. Peter in 1811. A Protestant living there asked him to preach a sermon in English. The Bishop demurred, arguing that he had come to minister to Roman Catholics. However, after

1. Report of the Archives of the Province of Quebec 1941/42

the Protestant pressed his point by saying that many of the Catholics also wanted to hear a sermon in English, the Bishop agreed and preached as desired. The author of the account of Bishop Plessis' trip describes the language of the people in this way:

"A Percé et à la Point Saint-Pierre il est assez difficile de décider laquelle des deux langues, anglaise ou française, est dominant. Tout le monde parle anglais, et presque tous entendent le français, de sorte qu'un missionnaire peut adopter celle qui lui convient le mieux." 1

From St. George's Cove, Archdeacon Mountain went up to Gaspé Basin and on August 26 he preached in the new church there. His journal records his visit. He says he heard

"...what we cannot boast of in the Cathedral in Quebec, a bell inviting the worshippers to the Temple which however was a mere unpainted barn yet it is a surprising building when it is remembered that the materials of which it is composed were growing in the woods on one Sunday and formed a church, framed, roofed and boarded in, in which Mr. Suddard preached on the next. The inside has since been pewed and there is some little attempt at ornament in the pulpit and reading desk. The Communion Table is also enclosed with rails. The congregation was decent and attentive and the music and singing very superior to the ordinary performance in country churches, being chiefly conducted by one family which supplies a female and three male voices, a flute, violincello and violin. .

After prayers read by Mr. Suddard and a sermon delivered by myself, I convened the heads of families and endeavoured to put things in train for the completion of the Church and parsonage and the establishment of a school."

These heads of families probably came from all around the Bay, and this visit by Archdeacon Mountain must have been long talked of in their homes.

1. Revue d'Histoire de la Gaspésie, Avril - juin, Juillet - sept., 1968