

Watercolour from P. J. Bainbridge showing St-François Camp on the Temiscouata Road in 1842. The Kempt Road, surely, was showing the same resemblance. LAC, acquisition 1956-62-121.



Postal Service along the Kempt Road

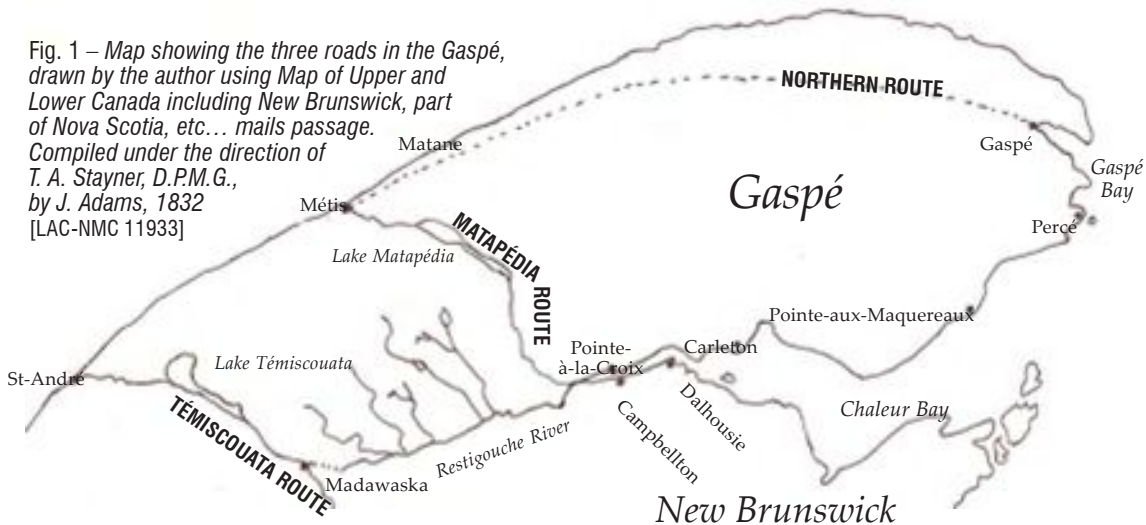
Ferdinand Bélanger

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, before the construction of the Kempt Road, a traveller had three possible routes to get from the Gaspé to the central province¹. Thomas Allen Stayner (1788-1868)², Deputy Postmaster General for Upper and Lower Canada, located the positions of the various post offices and the principal postal routes³ on a map produced in 1832, including the courses of the three roads in the Gaspé (Fig. 1).

The Northern Route

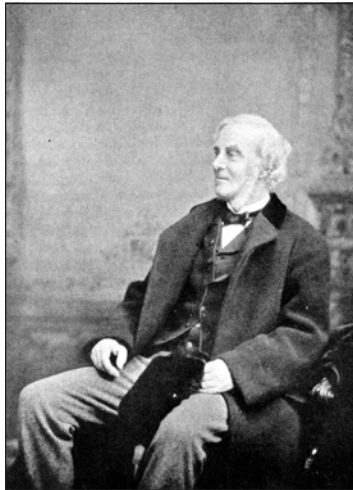
It was necessary to follow the coastline of the St. Lawrence River to reach Quebec City from the Gaspé. This was certainly the road followed by the couriers (those charged with

carrying the dispatches) twice each winter in order to carry the mails from Quebec to Gaspé Bay, as mentioned in the report of March 26, 1831⁴, issued by the Special Committee of the



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Fig. 2 – William
H. Griffin.
[from William
Smith,
The History of
the Post Office
in British North
America
1639-1870,
p. 273]



House of Assembly. It must be noted that in fine weather, between the months of May and October inclusively, all correspondence was carried by boat⁵.

In a letter dated and sent to Stayner on October 6, 1845, Postal Inspector William Henry Griffin (1812-1900)² (Fig. 2) wrote that in the spring of 1836 he had been mandated by the former to establish, if possible, a new postal route in order to serve the needs of Gaspé Bay^{6,7}. However, use of this new post road was begun only in July of 1838⁸. Letters left Quebec every Wednesday morning at 11:30 and were carried as far as Métis⁹. They were carried from there along the Kempt Road, and then skirted Chaleur Bay to arrive finally at Percé and Gaspé⁶.

An 1839 map produced from the one of 1832³ clearly shows the route the courier had to follow to reach Gaspé Bay. After following the Kempt Road (Fig. 3) to the Restigouche River he took the ferry to Campbellton. From there he had to get to Dalhousie and again cross the river by boarding another ferry, which landed very close to Carleton. He then

had only to follow the road toward Gaspé¹⁰. This means of travel was modified somewhat around July 1846. Around that time the section of the route linking Pointe-à-la-Croix to Carleton was opened; from then on the courier no longer had to cross into New Brunswick and use their ferries. At the same time, the post office at Pointe-à-la-Croix was established on July 6, 1846¹¹.

Southern Route by way of the Matapédia

In the south all that was needed was to take the Restigouche River, go up the Matapédia River to the lake of the same name, then take a path to the Métis River and come out on the St. Lawrence River. It seems that this was the principal path taken by the Micmac Indians who came for the hunting and fishing in the valley of the Matapédia.

When the War of 1812 broke out, Sir John Coape Sherbrooke (1764-1830)², Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, fearing that the Americans would seize the dispatches, suggested that the couriers who departed from Halifax not go to Fredericton, N.B. Instead, he recommended that, upon their departure from Amherst, N.S., they make their way by going by the northwest in order to reach the Matapédia River. Then they had only to ascend that river up to Lake Matapédia, and carry on from there up to Métis. George Heriot (1759-1839)², Deputy Postmaster General for Lower and Upper Canada, strongly objected to this, and no change was made to the initial route, in use since 1783. He held absolutely that the couriers should continue to route the dispatches by way of the Témiscouata portage¹². It seems that this was the first time that anyone had proposed sending correspondence by way of Matapédia.

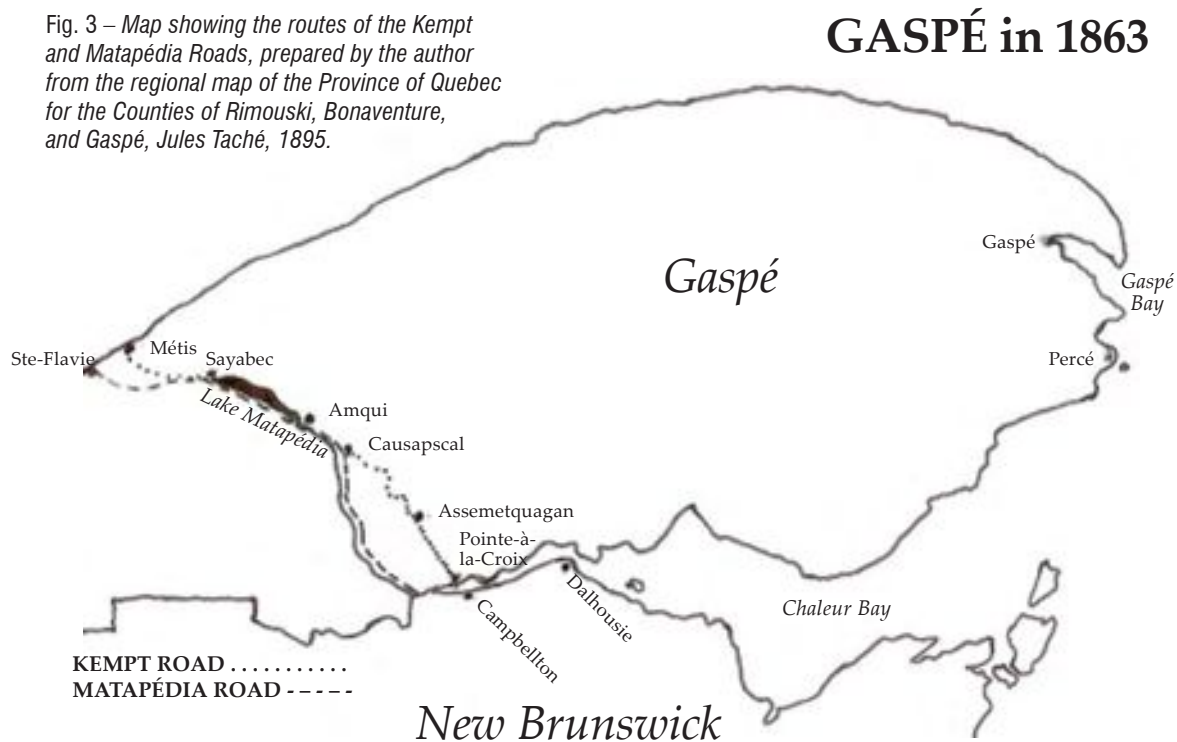
The King's Road was completed up to Métis

in 1824¹³. Was the Matapédia Valley used to take the mails to Chaleur Bay during winter in that era? It is quite plausible, since the following notice appeared in the *Quebec Gazette* on December 29, 1825: "A mail for Métis and Restigouche will be made up and closed on Friday the 6th January at 2 o'clock PM"¹⁴. It seems that this route was used up to 1831. In that year Stayner established a weekly mail delivery service which made use of the Témiscouata Road¹⁵. This practice was halted in July 1838. From then on couriers would use the Kempt Road to carry the mails to Chaleur Bay and Gaspé Bay⁸ (Fig. 3).

Southern Route by Way of the Témiscouata

In the south, another option was to go up the Restigouche River to its source, make a portage, and run along various rivers to come out finally on the Témiscouata Road. Although it was easy to travel over this route, it was inconvenient because the distance involved was much greater. This was surely the means by which the letters addressed to the post office serving Chaleur Bay were carried in this period¹⁶. In support of this statement, it should be mentioned that in a letter dated March 15, 1812, George Heriot stated that since the winter of 1803 the mail from Chaleur Bay was carried along the Restigouche River¹⁷. Furthermore, the

Fig. 3 – Map showing the routes of the Kempt and Matapédia Roads, prepared by the author from the regional map of the Province of Quebec for the Counties of Rimouski, Bonaventure, and Gaspé, Jules Taché, 1895.



following statement appeared in the *Quebec Gazette* on November 12, 1812: "Notice is hereby given, that letters forwarded by the Post Office from Halifax, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec for the Bay of Chaleur, to Mr. Pierre Duperre Madaska, will be conveyed to said Bay by the courier". This notice came from the Restigouche post office and bears the signature of Edward I. Mann (1766-1830), postmaster (1804-1830)¹⁶.

Later, on March 1, 1831, Stayner appeared before a committee of the House of Assembly and stated that he had inaugurated a weekly service for the transportation of dispatches to Chaleur Bay. He explained that a courier left Quebec City every Tuesday morning at eleven o'clock⁹, used the Témiscouata Road to Fredericton, arrived next at Mirimachi, and finally ran along Chaleur Bay as far as Dalhousie¹⁵. From there another courier took the ferry to bring the dispatches to Carleton, ending his run at Pointe-aux-Maquereaux. The first three couriers to traverse this final portion of the route were James Hawie, John Johnston, and Archibald Kerr¹⁸. Use of the portage route was discontinued in July of 1838.

Hesitant Beginnings

Antoine Bernard (1890-1967) enumerated very well the reasons that inspired the authorities to dream of building an effective route in the Matapédia Valley. He mentioned that "the memory of three years of war with the United States (1812-1814), the uncertainty of the borders with Maine, the danger of an invasion of the Maritime Provinces by American troops, as well as the need for a better route for the postal service attracted attention"¹⁹.

It seems that Edward Isaac Mann, the Restigouche pioneer, was the first to submit plans to the Governor for the construction of a road in the Matapédia Valley. He was very

familiar with the old Micmac trails, and was a fervent supporter of a route connecting Métis and Restigouche²⁰. In 1818 the colonial authorities feared an American invasion like the one of 1812, and so decided to explore and survey this territory. Thus they gave Joseph Bouchette (1774-1841)² (Fig. 4) the tasks of exploration and determining if it would be



Fig. 4 –
Joseph Bouchette,
by George
Engleheart.
[LAC, R-9266-2998,
reduced from the
original engraving.]

possible to open a strategic route in the Matapédia Valley¹³. In 1819 the Legislative Assembly of the government of Lower Canada voted a substantial sum for the construction of such a route²¹. Years passed and nothing was done. Faced with this inaction, in 1823 the residents of Chaleur Bay forwarded a petition in which they requested a post road be opened between their location and central Quebec – they wished to be relieved of their isolation. The first line of communication, the King's Road, was opened as far as Métis in 1824. Was this the factor that convinced the governor, George, Count of Dalhousie (George Ramsay, 1770-1838)², to authorize the engineer James Crawford to go explore the Matapédia Valley and to see under what conditions it would be possible

to construct a road to serve both military and postal requirements? This appeared to be a necessity, since the Témiscouata road, a rudimentary trail constructed by Governor Haldimand (1718-1791)² had become impracticable. In a letter dated May 4, 1824, Crawford wrote to A. W. Cochrane (1793-1849)², civil secretary, and informed him of his explorations. This letter, one of the first documents on the subject of the Matapédia Valley, shows clearly that there was not even a footpath there²². The report did not seem to encourage the governor to push forward with his project for the construction of a new road; the work began only six years later²³.

Construction Begins

There is an archival document which clearly identifies the two principal individuals responsible for initiating construction of a military road in the Matapédia Valley; they were James Kempt (1765-1854)² (Fig. 5) and Howard Douglas

(1776-1861)^{2, 24}. The latter, named interim Commander in Chief of the Atlantic region of British North America, requested that the governor, Lord Dalhousie, initiate construction of a new road to link the St. Lawrence with the New Brunswick border; Dalhousie did not accede to this request. James Kempt became governor in 1828, replacing Lord Dalhousie, and from that moment the project to achieve this first link between central Quebec and the Gaspé Peninsula was truly set in motion.

In 1829, at the request of Governor Kempt, William Macdonald, accompanied by a surveyor, made a first exploration with a view to the construction of the new road, which would later be called the Kempt Road. Macdonald was working as the Crown Lands agent in the district. He also held the position of inspector overseeing the construction of the greatest part of this road.

Work commenced in the spring of 1830 under the supervision of Macdonald and Major Wolfe. Given that this new road was to have military destiny, it was completely normal that the Department of the Militia was responsible for the construction and supervision of works, thus explaining the presence of Major Wolfe. In that year, accompanied by a civil servant named Franchis and the young surveyor Frédéric Fournier, he completed the laying out, and oversaw the works for the part of the route between Métis and Matapédia. Upon the resumption of work in the following year an unfortunate accident occurred. The surveyor Fournier, 22 years old and a native of St-Jean-Port-Joli, was drowned on June 6 between Amqui and Lac-au-Saumon. Construction of the Kempt Road between Métis and the head of Lake Matapédia ended in the autumn of 1831²⁵. It should be said that in reality, this



SIR JAMES KEMPT

James Kempt

Fig. 5 –
Sir James Kempt.
[LAC, Acq. 1990-
553-322, reduced
from the original
engraving.]

road was only a first stage. It had been laid out in haste and without care. From Métis (Pointe-aux-Cenelles) to Lake Matapédia the road was passable. The road existed only in a very rough state along the lakeshore. For this reason a ferry-boat supplied by the government picked up travellers at the head of the lake (Sayabec) and transported them to the outlet (Amqui), from which they continued on this so-called road across the woods to Restigouche (Ruisseaux-des-Officiers). The total construction costs of the road for the years 1830 to 1832 were \$29,064²⁶.

The lands that lay along the Kempt Road belonged to the Crown, with the exception of that portion situated near the St. Lawrence, which was a part of the seigniory of Métis. It seems that the proprietors had foreseen a good deal with the construction of this road. They considered building a toll bridge on the Grand Métis River. Once a week in the period from September 22 to November 16, 1831 Adam Lymburner Macnider (1778-1840)² placed the following announcement in the *Quebec Gazette*:

"Public notice is hereby given, that the subscriber will apply in the legislature of this province at the next session, for the exclusive privilege of erecting a toll bridge over the river Grand-Métis in the county of Rimouski, at, or the most convenient place to correspond with the road leading to Restigouche.

"Rates of toll,

- every coach, or other four-wheel carriage load or unloaded, with the driver and four person or less, drawn by two horses or other beast of draught, two shilling currency
- for every person on foot, one shilling and half shilling currency."

It is interesting to note that Macnider was the postmaster at Métis from October 7, 1839 until his death on November 9, 1840²⁷.

The Years that Followed

The authorities, being ever fearful of a war with the United States, pondered the necessity of having an effective postal and military road between Quebec and Halifax, in order to forward dispatches, soldiers, and materiel. They wished to determine which of the two roads, the Témiscouata or the Kempt, would be the more appropriate for use in case of an American invasion. Stayner attempted to answer this question in a letter dated November 30, 1838; for him, the better road was without doubt the Kempt Road. He saw several reasons for putting this choice first. The main reason was that this road traversed a territory undisputed by the U.S., and thus eliminated any risk of an interruption in the transport of dispatches. He mentioned however that there could be a problem if the Americans were to invade New Brunswick. The other great advantage seen was of a military nature. This route was essential for the government because troops and arms could be furnished directly from Halifax to Restigouche by boat. All the same, there was a down side: the road had never been properly finished. Furthermore, in recent years many trees had intruded on the road, and numerous potholes were strewn along its route. The only method of travel was on foot, and it would cost between £15,000 and £18,000 to make a carriage-road on which military supply vehicles could travel²⁸.

Around the year 1839, T. A. Stayner (Fig. 6) was named a commissioner with a view to the repair of the Kempt Road in the Gaspé District. His seconds in this task were three deputy commissioners: Arthur Ritchie,

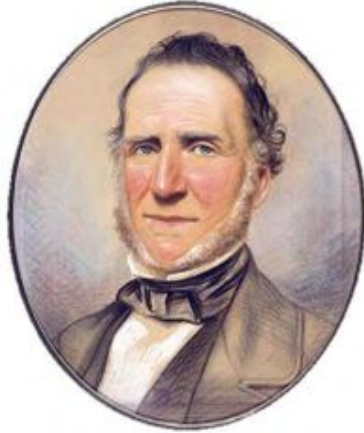


Fig. 6 – *Thomas Allen Stayner*.
[LAC, Acq. 1989-565 CPA]

postmaster at Campbellton (1837-1845)²⁷, George Dickson, mail contractor⁸, and Adam Macnider⁹.

On August 1, 1839 A. Van Spiegel, of the Treasury Council, forwarded to Stayner a copy of a dispatch sent to the Colonial Secretary by Governor General Sir John Colborne (1778-1863)², in which the latter assigned a higher advantage to the Kempt Road for the postal communication of dispatches between Quebec and Halifax²⁹. During the course of the same year, Lieutenant J. W. Gordon of the Royal Engineers travelled along the Kempt Road at the request of Colin Campbell, K.C.B., of the Department of the Militia of Halifax, who asked Gordon to go and repair the road and to see how much it would cost to complete the route as far as Quebec City. Campbell sent Gordon's report, dated July 29, 1839, to the Colonial Secretary of State in a letter dated August 1, 1839³⁰. In the report Gordon enumerated the strategic advantages described by Stayner. Furthermore, at the end

of the document, he mentioned that for the safety of the soldiers they owed it to themselves to hire wood-cutters and settlers to fell and saw the trees. He found that the soldiers lacked experience, and furthermore feared that the annoyance brought about by the flies could affect them, and suggested that the soldiers might be guards. It was estimated that four years would be required to finish the road. When completed, the road should be 20 feet wide with 20 foot shoulders on each side. The total cost of the work was estimated to be £29,353³¹.

In spite of all the efforts, it seems that the road was forever in a pitiful state. In September 1845 Griffin made a visit of inspection to the Gaspé District⁶. Shortly after his return, on December 14 he reported to Stayner, indicating that it would be impossible to maintain effective postal communications in the region. In order to achieve that, the government would have to inject new money in order to have a passable road, and to establish relay stations for the security of couriers and travellers. Even though it had been possible to use light carriages on it since 1843, he noted that the road was relapsing into its initial state, which was to say of pitiful quality. Sleighs could not be used on it in winter – instead, couriers on snowshoes used dog-sleds (Fig. 7). Griffin also suggested that it would be important to add another relay station near the bridge over the Assemetquagan River. He mentioned that it would cost about £200 per year to keep the road in good repair. Finally, he concluded from all this that if nothing were done to improve the road, the Post Office would have to stop delivering government documents and carry only letters. Since the mail bags had become so heavy and numerous, it would be impossible to transport everything on horse-

Fig. 7 – *Mail transport in winter along the Kempt Road must surely have been similar to that seen in this watercolour by W. B. Amherst.*
[LAC, The mail carried across Lake Huron from..., by Wilkinson Berdoe Amherst, March 1853, Acq. R-9266-422]



back³². Stayner took this report very seriously. On the 18th of December he forwarded Griffin's report to Dominik Daly (1798-1863)², Provincial Secretary of Lower and Upper Canada³³. Two days later he sent this same report to Lt-Col Maberly, Secretary to the Postmaster General in England³⁴.

Stayner's initiative led the officials concerned with this file to find solutions to the problems of improving the road and keeping it safer and more usable by carriages. As a result of these exchanges of correspondence, Étienne Parent (1802-1874)², Under-secretary of the Province of Canada, was led on January 25, 1847 to publish a report issued by the Executive Committee. A. J. Russell, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands, suggested that there should be three or four guards on the road in order to lend a strong hand to any couriers or travellers in difficulty; these guards would each receive an annual salary of £25. Each guard would provide 14

days of work per year in order to keep up his share of the road³⁵. The mail contractor George Dickson supervised the work. An annual amount of £180 was placed at his disposal in order to proceed with the repairs; as manager, he was allowed to retain 10% of that amount. It was mentioned that it would be necessary to attract settlers to establish themselves along the road; to do that they were prepared to grant 50 acres of land to those who were willing settle there. They considered naming Dickson as land agent. Finally the establishment of a twice-weekly mail was suggested, rather than the weekly mail as was the case at the time³⁶. The plots of land offered found no takers. Beginning in March 1845 notices were issued indicating that the government was prepared to grant lands to those who were willing to establish themselves along the Kempt Road³⁷. On April 19, 1847 James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin and 12th Earl of Kincardine (1811-1863)², then

Governor General of Canada, announced that the government was willing to sell an additional 50 acres behind the 50 acres that had previously been granted. Furthermore, he mentioned that a railway was proposed which would run through the Matapédia Valley³⁸. In the same year the British government commissioned Major Robinson of the Royal Engineers to look into the possibility of building a railway line that would link Quebec City with a port in Nova Scotia. In his report he recommended a line through Halifax – Truro – Shediac – Matapédia – Ste-Flavie – Rivière-du-Loup. Even though the region was uninhabited, it was proposed to follow the Matapédia Valley³⁹. The project fell by the wayside due to a lack of financing, and to disputes concerning the route to be followed⁴⁰. Years passed. Stage coaches began to circulate in 1852, but were little used by travellers⁴¹.

The Matapédia Road

Government authorities continued to receive complaints about the lamentable condition of the Kempt Road (Fig. 3). It was surely for this reason that in 1857 the government undertook the construction of the Matapédia Road. The work was to be done in two phases, the first taking from 1857 to 1862 and the second from 1862 to 1867. In point of fact, they only wanted to improve the Kempt Road, wishing to make it a colonization road. In 1862, as a result of the Civil War raging in the United States, minds were changed and it was decided to make it into a military road. It was hoped that this new route would largely follow the line proposed by Major Robinson for the eventual rail line. Plans were prepared by A. J. Russell and subsequently completed by J. Page, Chief Engineer of the Department of Public Works⁴².

The work to be performed was divided into three parts. The northern section now departed from Ste-Flavie instead of Métis in order to end up at Pierre Brochu's place (Sayabec). Work on this section of the route began in 1859 under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Lamontagne, who was overseer and paymaster until 1862. The central section took in the part between Pierre Brochu's home and that of Jonathan Noble (Causapscal). Work between these two locales did not begin until 1863. Work on the southern section, which extended from Causapscal up to the Restigouche River, was initiated in 1857. It was necessary to follow the wanderings of the Matapédia River, according to the plans drawn up by Jean Lefebvre, superintendent of works. It is interesting to note that Joseph Meagher (1803-1877)¹⁶, postmaster at Carleton (1833-1877)²⁴, was the paymaster. When work ended in 1867, the route from Ste-Flavie to Restigouche had cost a total of \$187,870.85⁴².

Around September 1, 1865 couriers began using this new postal route, the Matapédia Road⁴³, and this lasted until July 1, 1876. On that date the Intercolonial Railway Company took up the task of transporting the mail between Ste-Flavie and Restigouche⁴⁴. Fast mail delivery service was no longer in any doubt.

The Relay Station Keepers

During the 1833 session of the Legislature, Édouard Thibaudeau asked the government to establish relay stations on the new Kempt Road⁴⁵. This lawyer, who had a practice in New Carlisle, served as Deputy (1830-1836) for Bonaventure County; he was a member of the Parti canadien, whose leader was Louis-Joseph Papineau⁴⁶. On April 3 of the same year the House of Assembly brought a petition before the British government asking for

authorization to pay each of the four station keepers who were to be established along the Kempt Road the annual sum of £25. These stations were seen to be necessary because of the lamentable quality of the road, and to serve as refuges for the travellers who had to venture into this uninhabited region. The main duty of these keepers would be to lend a strong hand to mail-carriers and travellers in difficulty. The stations were to be located at the following places: the first at the Head of the Lake (Sayabec), the second at the Small Lake (Lac-au-Saumon) about twenty miles from there, a third was to be established six miles below the Forks (Causapscal), and finally a fourth halfway between the Forks and the Restigouche River (Pointe-à-la-Croix)⁴⁷. According to the *Mémoire du Québec*, these stations were abolished in 1859⁴⁸. This seems very likely, since there were two camps on the Kempt Road noted on an 1860 map prepared by the Post Office Department. Camp #1 was located at the head of the lake near the River St-Pierre (Sayabec), while Camp #2 was located on the banks of the Causapscal River⁴⁹. For a better under-

standing of the placement of these stations, refer to Fig. 3.

We now go on to a more detailed study of these different relay stations. For this our main reference was the work of the abbot Jos. D. Michaud⁵⁰.

The station at the head of the lake (Sayabec): 1833 to 1859

This station was located 26 miles from Métis, and Pierre Brochu (1795-1871) was its first and only keeper; Major Wolfe had engaged him in 1833. Brochu knew the area well from having worked with the surveyors during the construction of the road (1831-1832). From that time up to 1839 he was the only inhabitant of the valley. He moved into a small house supplied by the government at the Head of the Lake, on the St-Pierre River, with a bed for visitors. Because there was no road along Lake Matapédia before 1839, it was he who operated the boat which transported people and animals between the Head of the Lake and the Forks. He was a mail contractor for several years, carrying the mail between Métis and the Forks. Having to



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support his family, and the government's allocation of £25 being insufficient, he undertook the task of clearing 300 acres of land and building a new house and a barn. Over the years he also worked in the lumber camps; he owned a sawmill and sold timber as well. He died at 76 years of age and was buried in the church of St-Octave-de-Métis.

The station at the forks (Causapscal): 1839 to 1859

The keeper at this station was the Loyalist Jonathan Noble (1796-1868) (Fig. 8). He settled at the forks in 1839 and built a large house fitted with several conveniences, situated on the site of the present-day church



Fig. 8 –
Jonathan Noble,
keeper at the Forks.
Taken from [http://](http://causapscal.net/1a.html)
causapscal.net/1a.html

at Causapscal. Prior to 1845 he was not recognized as the keeper by the government. However, in 1846, 1847, and the first six months of 1848 he was given an allowance corresponding to £25 per annum. He was notified in November 1848 that his name had been placed on the list of keepers in error, and that from that time on he would be dropped from that position. Noble objected, and made use of his connections. After frequent insistent demands made on the Provincial Secretary, he was finally informed that he would be paid an allowance; in 1858 he succeeded in getting £25 for each of the years between 1839 and 1845.

The station at Assemetquagan: 1848 to 1859

Before 1845 no one was living on the banks of the Assemetquagan River. In 1848 A. H. Sims, Commissioner of Public Roads, mentioned the name of Thomas Evans as being a resident at Assemetquagan, and asked for the payment of arrears due to him for the year 1847. He won his case in the following year, and like Noble, he would be the keeper of the station until 1859.

The station at the little lake (Lac-au-Saumon): 1847 to 1859

Abbot Michaud mentioned that there was a station at the outlet of the lake (Amqui) and another at the small lake (Lac-au-Saumon). Was it really necessary to maintain two relay stations for keepers located so near one another? We think not, and believe that the one at the small lake was the only one that was subsidized. Our view is supported by the fact that in 1833 the government had mentioned the necessity of establishing four stations on the Kempt Road, including one at Lac-au-Saumon. For this reason we include only the station at the small lake.

The first resident to locate at the little lake was the Indian Para, who was not a subsidized station keeper. Around 1848 a person called Peter Glasgow settled at this location and acted as the keeper. Not receiving any remuneration, he soon decided to leave. In 1849 Pierre Brochu Junior settled at the small lake and became a keeper subsidized by the government. Four years later he sold his house to Georges Lebel, who continued in the role of keeper. He finally left Lac-au-Saumon in 1863.

Before leaving this section, it is interesting to note that Marcel Brochu, the brother of Pierre, settled at the small lake in 1850 (Fig. 9).

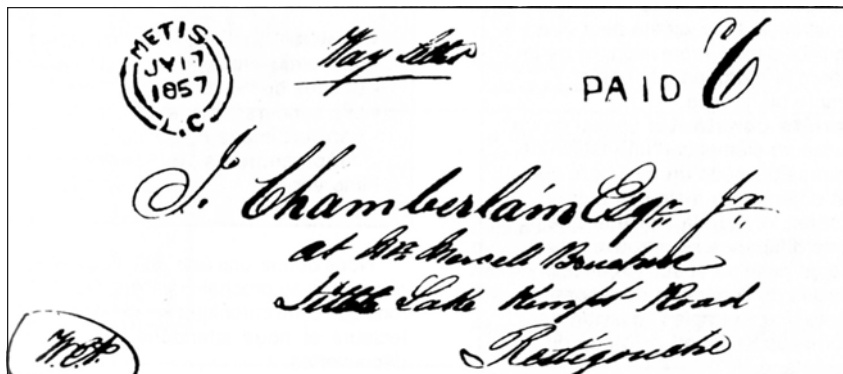


Fig. 9 – Cover mailed from Métis and delivered to Marcel Brochu at the Little Lake. [ex-Bélanger]

The Mail Contractors

The weekly service for the delivery of mail via the Kempt Road made its debut in July 1838, and on this occasion mail contracts were granted. One of the first contracts for the transport of mails along the road is found in archival documents. This document states that Pierre Brochu was to cover a distance of 39 miles in transporting the mails from Métis to the Forks of Matapédia (Causapscal). His contract took effect on July 6, 1838 and ran to July 5, 1841. He was to take two days to cover the distance on foot once every week, for which he was to receive £150 per year. He had to use snowshoes in the winter. It was mentioned that there were only two inhabitants on this portion of the road, which in reality was only a footpath. It was furthermore indicated that Brochu was subject to a £100 penalty if he did not honour his contract. Finally, P. E. Gauvreau and P. Gauvreau provided sureties for Pierre Brochu⁸.

During the same time period another contract provides information on the transportation of the mails along the other section of the road, between the Forks and New Brunswick (Dalhousie), where George Dickson was the contractor. The distance he had to cover was 57 miles, and in addition he

had to serve the post offices at Campbellton and Dalhousie. Dickson's contract commenced on July 6, 1840 and ran to July 5, 1841. He also had to traverse his route on foot, once every week. The delivery of the mails had to be carried out diligently, which is to say promptly and efficiently. As stipulated in the document, he was to receive £150 per year for his services⁸. Everything leads to the belief that he and Brochu started as mail contractors at the same time, around 1838. The names of Brochu and Dickson are inscribed on a draft drawn up by Gordon A. Campbell dated July 29, 1839, and beside each of their names was added *mail courier*⁵¹.

A change was brought about in the course of the years 1843 and 1844. There was only a single contractor to carry letters between Métis and Campbellton. Did this come about following improvements made to the Kempt Road between 1842 and 1844⁵²? A statement of account was found which mentions that George Dickson received an amount of £75 for the transport of the mails. This represented payment for the final three months of his contract which began on April 6, 1843⁵³, the cost of which was fixed at £300 annually. Another document exists, covering the period

from April 6, 1844 to April 5, 1847, in which there is something new. It mentions that during the summer months the courier was to travel the 96 miles separating Métis and Campbellton once a week on horseback. During the winter the route was still to be traversed on foot, with snowshoes. James Stewart and George Moffatt provided the sureties guaranteeing Dickson's contract⁵⁴.

It is noted in the *Report of the Postmaster General* for the year 1852 that George Dickson was still the mail contractor, and that he traversed the route once a week for the annual sum of £250. Travel was still by foot in winter and by horseback in summer⁵⁵. The Postmaster General's *Report* stated that the conditions of the contract for 1853 were identical to those of the previous year.

A contract covering the period from July 1, 1862 to June 30, 1863 shows that certain changes were made. George Dickson was still

the contractor who transported the mails between Métis and Campbellton, but this time the mails were delivered twice a week. Furthermore, payment of \$1800 was then made in Canadian dollars, and the travel time was to be accomplished in 25 hours. Melvin Adams and A. A. Nicol provided Dickson's sureties. A new twist was brought to the means of transport: in summer a horse-drawn wagon was to be used. In winter travel was still on foot, with or without snowshoes, accompanied by a dog-sled, or, when possible, a sleigh (Fig. 10)⁵⁶. Conditions of the contract for 1864 and for the one ended August 31, 1865 were the same as those preceding. Even though the Kempt Road was supposed to be the main postal route to Quebec City, it seems that during the summer boats were used for the transport of the mail between the two points (Fig. 11).

On May 4, 1865, W. G. Sheppard, Post



Fig. 10 – “The Royal Mail at Quebec, Canada East”. This watercolour on pencil by Amelia Frederica Dyneley, painted in 1848, surely shows the same sort of dog-sled used in that period along the Kempt Road.

[Source: LAC, Coverdale collection, C-040269]

Fig. 11 – Letter sent from New Carlisle on July 23 and received at Quebec on July 26, 1862. The correspondence was carried on the boat *Lady Head*.

[Source: Longley Auctions, Sale No. 1, July 24, 2000, lot 222, ex-Parsons]



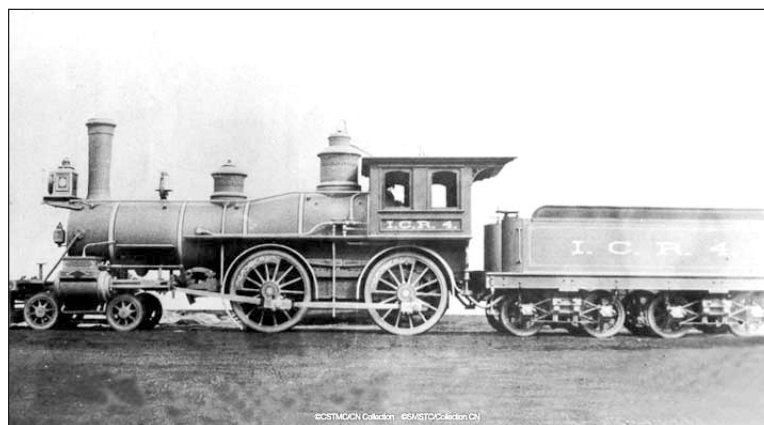
Office Inspector for the Quebec District, issued an announcement for Postmaster General W. P. Howland (1811-1907)² in which he invited tenders for the transportation of the mails. The announcement read: "Sealed tenders addressed to the Postmaster General and inscribed Tenders for Postal Service will be received at Quebec until noon, Friday July seven, for the transport of His Majesty's Mails between Ste-Flavie, Canada and Campbellton, on and from next September 1... The route to be followed for the transport of these mails would be by the new Matapédia Road. The known distance between Ste-Flavie and Campbellton is 110 miles... cover the distance in 28 hours from June 1 to September 30, and in 36 hours during the rest of the year"⁴³. Twelve people submitted their tenders, and the contract was granted to the lowest bidder, in this case Daniel Fraser of Restigouche, who would receive \$1500 annually for the work. It may be noted that George Dickson asked double that price for the same service, and so he had to give up his post after having been the contractor for more than 27 years. The new contract stipulated that the mails should be delivered twice a week; a wagon drawn by

two horses was to be used⁵⁷. Daniel Fraser would be the contractor for the years between 1865 and the first half of 1876. His final contract terminated at the end of June 1876, as indicated in a letter sent by W. G. Sheppard to the Postmaster General " the Intercolonial Railway took over the contract as of July 1 (Fig. 12). This date coincided with the official inauguration of the railway line linking Ste-Flavie and Campbellton⁴⁴. From then on the horse would be replaced by the iron horse, and with that came the end of a heroic era; a page had now been turned.

Before ending this section it would be good to take note of those who were the real pioneers, the couriers of the early days. There is no doubt that George Dickson hired a number of them during the course of the many years he contracted for the mails. In October 1848, during his travels on the Kempt Road, Professor James Finlay Weir Johnston (1796-1855)² relates that Dickson was a Scotsman and that he was the proprietor of a clean, comfortable inn. He was in addition the mail contractor and the supervisor responsible for the maintenance of the road. He said that the road was still eight miles from

Fig. 12 – *Steam locomotive No. 4 of the Intercolonial Railway.*

[Source: Science and Technology Museum Canada, Collection CN-002694]



TIME BILL FROM QUEBEC TO GASPÉ BASIN (VIA MÉTIS.)									
Post-Masters will state whether the hour is A. M. or P. M.									
Date.	Day of the Week.	POST OFFICES.	Distance in Miles.	Hour of Arrival.	Hour of Departure.	Names of Couriers.	Signatures of the Postmasters.	No. of Bags in Courier's charge.	RE. When the Postmaster will note
5 July	Monday	Quebec, - - -			4 10 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
7 July	Tuesday	Métis, - - -	207	3 PM	6 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
11 July	Sunday	Restigouche, - - -	96	8 AM	3 PM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
14 July	Monday	Dalhousie, N. B. - -	15	7 PM	8 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
12	Monday	Carleton, - - -	12	4 PM	4 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
13	Tuesday	New Carlisle, - - -	50	9 AM	1 PM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
14	Thursday	Cape Cove, - - -	61	8 AM	6 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
	Friday	Percé, - - -	9	11 PM	1 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
	Sunday	Point St. Peter, - -	15	7 PM	7 AM	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
	Friday	Gaspé Basin, - - -	22	4 PM	-	John Gagner	Henry Page	4	Inn
		Total, - - -	487						

Fig. 13 – Time sheet for the transport of the mails between Quebec and Gaspé-Bassin via Métis of July 16, 1847.
[Source: LAC, RG3, vol. 1007, file 6]

the Restigouche ferry. It took Johnston three days to make the trip from Métis to Campbellton using a light horse-drawn carriage, including a half hour to ferry across the Restigouche River⁵⁸. The names of some of these courageous people are found in old documents. Donald McLaren, Duncan McGregor and Alexander McGregor are mentioned in the March 1, 1845 edition of the *Quebec Mercury*⁵⁹. There is an 1847 time sheet (Fig. 13) on which the name of John Gagner is written as courier between Métis and Pointe-à-la-Croix⁶⁰. In that same year time sheets were prepared at the request of Stayner for the different postal routes under his jurisdiction, and these reveal some very interesting information. As an example: "the

courier will leave Métis on Wednesday evening at 6 p.m. and will reach Restigouche at noon on Sunday, while another will leave Restigouche on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. and will arrive at Métis on Wednesday at 2 o'clock in the afternoon⁶¹."

During those first years the lot of a courier was very hard. He had the heavy work of transporting the mails over a wild and inhospitable road. In the summer he had to deal with the mosquitoes; in the spring and winter he had to face the whims of Mother Nature. In addition it should be remembered

that in those years these men travelled over the route on foot, carrying on their backs one or two mail bags which could weigh between thirty-five and forty pounds. Even more, in the winter they had to travel over 195 miles every six days on snowshoes. Some didn't live to tell the tale.

An article from the *Quebec Mercury* journal of March 1, 1845 concerning the tragic end of a mail courier can be paraphrased as follows: "For the past 18 months Donald McLaren, 36, has been carrying the mails between Métis and Restigouche. At the beginning of the year 1845 the winter was very harsh. McLaren enjoyed a strong constitution and an endurance capable of anything; fatigue seemed to be unknown to him. After a storm he was the first to get back on the road, and he stopped only to eat. He could keep up this pace for three days and three nights. Even so, the numerous snowstorms that have fallen since the beginning of January exhausted him, and forced him to keep to his bed at the home of the Métis postmaster (1841-1856), Henry E. Page²⁷. When he was feeling well again he left for Restigouche, but on the way he had to face the worst storm of the winter. On Saturday morning he left Low's camp. He had to travel 42 miles to come to the first house in Restigouche. During the course of the trip he stopped at Peter Glasgow's camp. The latter saw the storm getting worse and noticed the precarious health of the courier. An hour after the courier had left, Glasgow decided to don his snowshoes and go to his aid. The blizzard was so strong that traces of footsteps were starting to disappear under the blanket of snow. Around nine o'clock he found the poor courier lying under a spruce tree with the mailbag under his head. It was apparent to Glasgow that he had gotten up and back on the road again, but in the end had given up from weakness. Glasgow lit a fire, which allowed the courier to

sleep for a bit. Early in the morning they got themselves to the nearest house. Someone was sent from there to seek help from Mr. Dixon. Donald McGregor, McLaren's replacement, with the help of several others, carried the mail to Mr. Dixon's house, where the best care was lavished on him, all in vain. After thirty-six hours of suffering, he died on January 28, 1845. Another equally dramatic incident had occurred three years earlier when the brother of Donald McGregor was drowned on Lake Matapédia while delivering the mail."²⁹

Before ending this account, it would be well to add that not one post office was ever opened on the Kempt Road. It could not be otherwise; only six houses were found along this road. ☒

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