

# Postmasters of the Gaspé

1789 – 1837

*Ferdinand Bélanger*



*Percé Island.* COURTESY – Hervey Smith, L.A.C. C-000784.

At the end of the eighteenth century the immense territory included in the Gaspé region was called the Lower Gaspé District. In that era it seems that the Gaspé peninsula was divided into two distinct districts for the purposes of the postal administration: Chaleur Bay and Gaspé Bay. Information taken from a number of sources allows us to understand a little more about the beginnings of the postal service in that region.

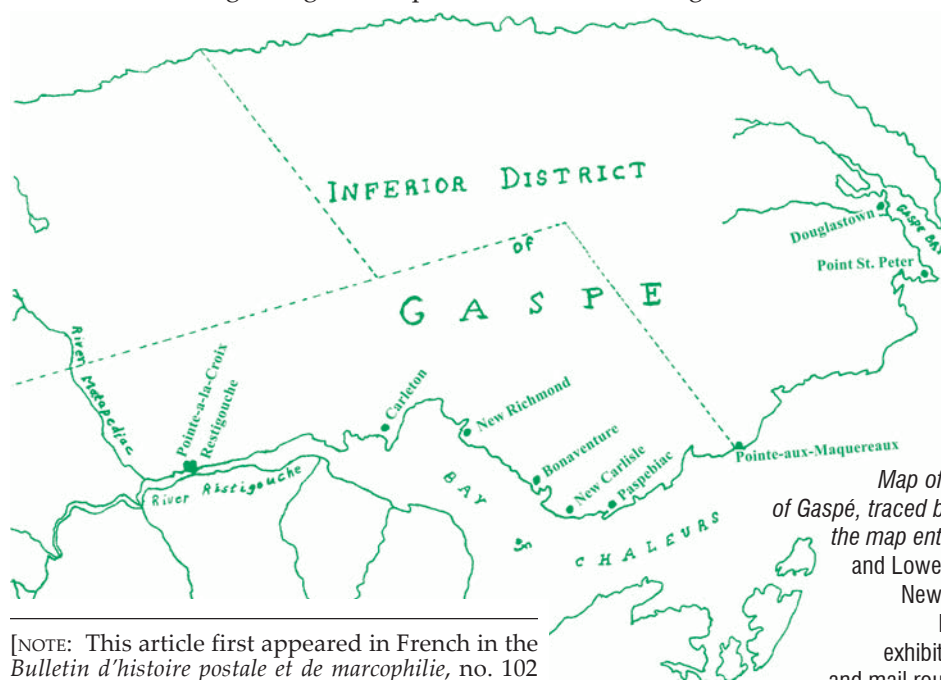


Fig. 1 –  
Map of the Lower District  
of Gaspé, traced by F. Bélanger from  
the map entitled Map of Upper  
and Lower Canada including  
New Brunswick, part of  
Nova Scotia, etc...  
exhibiting the post towns  
and mail routes the latter being  
as to indicate the frequency of the  
mails passages. October 1832.  
Courtesy BANQ-NMC 11933.

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### *Chaleur Bay District*

The name of the post office which appeared in the *Quebec Almanac* for the years 1791 to 1837 is Baie-des-Chaleurs, with the exception of the year 1820, when the name Restigouche<sup>1</sup> was attached to it. It is interesting to note that the several known and rare postmarked letters bore the name of the District of Chaleur Bay. The name of the village in which the post office was located only appeared on covers from 1831 on.

### *New Carlisle*

It was under the direction of Hugh Finlay, who in 1788 became Deputy Postmaster

General of the Province of Canada, of Nova Scotia, and of New Brunswick<sup>2</sup>, that the postal service took shape in the Gaspé. It is almost certain that the first post office in the Gaspé opened in the year 1789. In order to confirm this statement, the information was printed in the publications of the day, the *Quebec Almanac* and the *Quebec Gazette*<sup>3</sup>. It is important to mention that the first two publications are essential tools for an improved understanding of the beginnings of the postal service in this corner of the country. It is not easy to find research material which can shed light on this heroic era.

The *Quebec Almanacs* of 1780 to 1841, major sources of information, were consulted at the

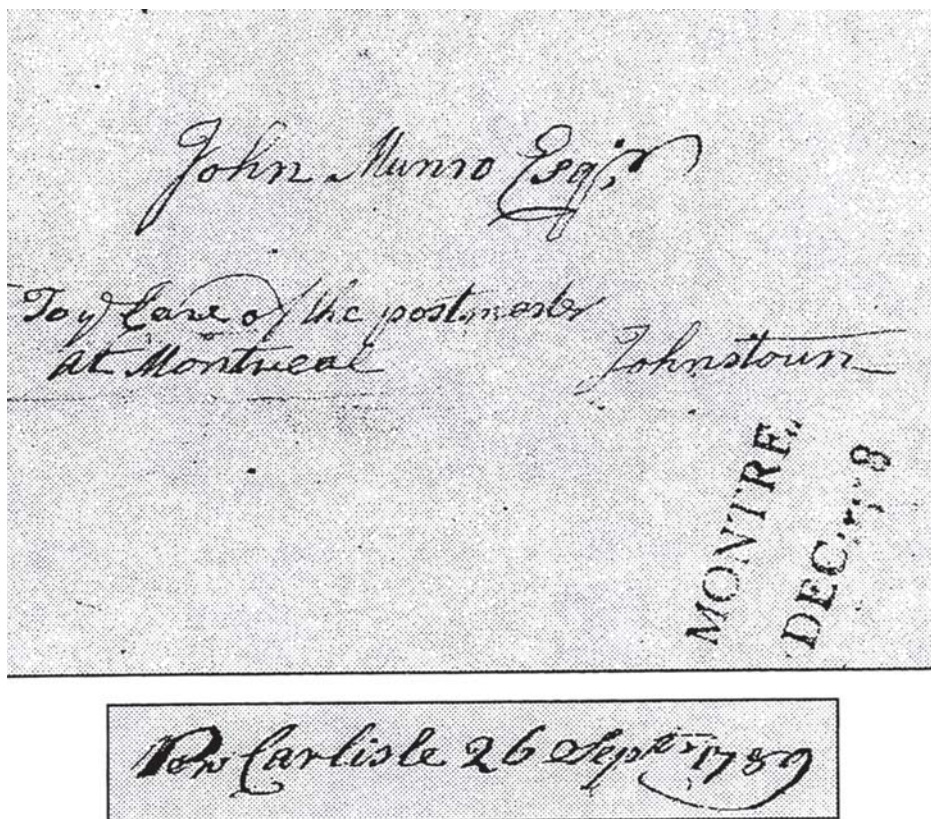


Fig. 2 – Letter mailed by Donald Munro, datelined New Carlisle 26 Sept 1789, to John Munro in Montreal.  
COURTESY – C. Faucher and J. Poitras.

very beginning, even though this was not an official publication. There was no mention of a post office in the Gaspé for the years prior to 1790. An office by the name of Baie-des-Chaleurs was listed in 1791. It was mentioned there that Hugh Munro (1764–1846)<sup>4</sup> was the officer in charge of it. Given that the information contained in the 1791 edition was sent to the editor in December 1790, there is no doubt that the office existed in 1790. Is it possible that the office was opened in 1789? The answer cannot be learned from the *Quebec Almanac*, because for various reasons the edition of 1790 never saw the light of day. The incontrovertible proof of the opening year is found in a collection of early covers. The cover in question is one having great historical value (Fig. 2). It is a letter written from New Carlisle and dated on September 26, 1789 which validates 1789 as being the opening year of the first post office in the Gaspé Peninsula. Donald Munro (?–1804) sent this cover to John Munro (1728–1800), who was located in the Montreal area. Here are a few lines from the contents of the letter:

“Hugh has left me about my own affairs being in the first place capt. of milice, Inspector of Salmon and Herring and D(eputy): postmaster etc... But he is to spend the winter with me.”<sup>5</sup>

Genealogical research indicates that Donald Munro was the stepfather of Hugh, and that John was his maternal uncle<sup>6</sup>. The last-named operated a post office at Matilda in Upper Canada<sup>1</sup> around the same time. It is interesting to note that this letter took more than ten weeks to reach Montreal on December 8, 1789. It has no markings nor postal rating, and was probably carried to Montreal by boat, certainly by favour. Furthermore, it seems that the cover is the only known example which left this area during that period.

Following up on the research, the *Quebec Almanac* names Hugh Munro as postal officer up to 1800. His name no longer appears in 1801, although the name of the Baie-des-Chaleurs office is still there. There is no mention of the office from 1802 to 1804, but it is again listed in 1805. In light of this, it can be concluded that Hugh Munro was postmaster from 1789 to 1800, and that the post office of New Carlisle was not in operation from 1801.

Hugh Munro was born in Scotland somewhere around 1764. He emigrated with his parents to New York in 1774, and due to the American War of Independence, left for Quebec in 1783<sup>4</sup>. On the list entitled “List of Names of Loyalists and Veterans Embarked for the Chaleur Bay on Provincial Ships, Quebec, June 9, 1784” it is mentioned that Hugh and Donald Munro had embarked on the brig *St. Peter*<sup>8</sup>. They were part of a group of about 315 people who first disembarked at Paspébiac, and reassembled several months later at New Carlisle and in the vicinity of Douglastown<sup>9</sup>; Hugh Munro decided to settle at New Carlisle. This leads us to believe that the first post office was located in that village, because in those days post offices were situated in private homes.

In the *Quebec Almanac* we find information allowing us to conclude that Hugh Munro was very much involved in his community. Toward 1788 he was named Inspector of Fisheries. In the following year he became a postal officer. In the period from 1792 to 1800 he held the offices of Judge of Common Pleas (until 1794), Commissioner of Oaths, Justice of the Peace, and Captain in the British Militia for Cox Canton. On November 19, 1800 he married Martha Harriet Sherar of New Carlisle<sup>6</sup>. In the same year he was named a judge in the Surrogate Court of New Brunswick<sup>10</sup>. Did he move to the neighbouring



province in that same period? Everything leads to that belief. That would without doubt explain why the name of Hugh Munro no longer appears as postmaster in the *Almanacs* for the years after 1800.

In order to conclude the study of this first office, here is what is mentioned in the *Quebec Almanac* for the period from 1791 to 1795 on the subject of the transportation of the mails to the Gaspé: "The mails for the establishments in the Gaspé, Chaleur Bay, etc. ... are handled in accordance with the needs of the occasion". This method of proceeding must have been used during the winter months, since letters were carried by boat during the rest of the year.

### *Restigouche*

Following the closure of the office at New Carlisle, it was decided after several years to open another office in the region. George Heriot (1759–1839)<sup>4</sup>, Hugh Finlay's successor,

signed a letter on April 27, 1804 in which he named M. Mann as postmaster for the district of the Chaleur Bay; his given name is omitted in this document. It is also mentioned that this work gave him the right to the usual commission of 20% of the office's revenues<sup>11</sup>.

In the *Quebec Almanacs* of 1805 to 1816 the name of the postmaster listed is J. B. Mann. The name of the office does not appear in 1817. From 1818 to 1820 the name of Isaac Mann is found. Finally, from 1821 to 1830 the name of Edward Isaac Mann is mentioned. Even though there are three different names listed for this office, it appears almost certain that one and only one person filled the position of postmaster from 1804 to 1830, which is to say Edward Isaac Mann. The irrefutable proof confirming this statement is found in the *Quebec Gazette*. There is found a notice indicating: "Post Office, Restigouche / Chaleur Bay, 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1812... / EDWd. I. MAN. Post Master". It must also be mentioned that

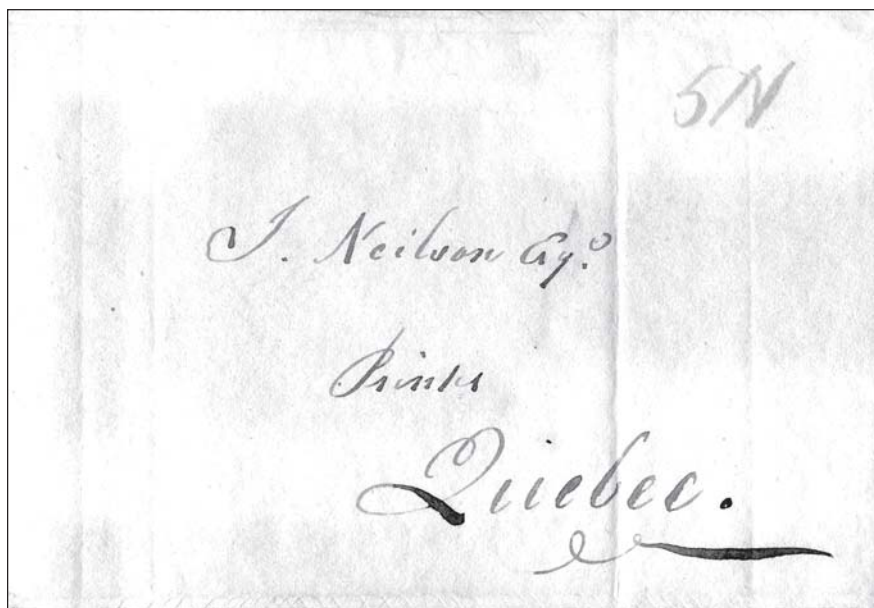


Fig. 3 – Letter written at New Carlisle by William Crawford, Judge of the Provincial Court for the Lower Gaspé District.

COURTESY – LAC, MG 24, Series B-1, vol. 2, cover no. 70.

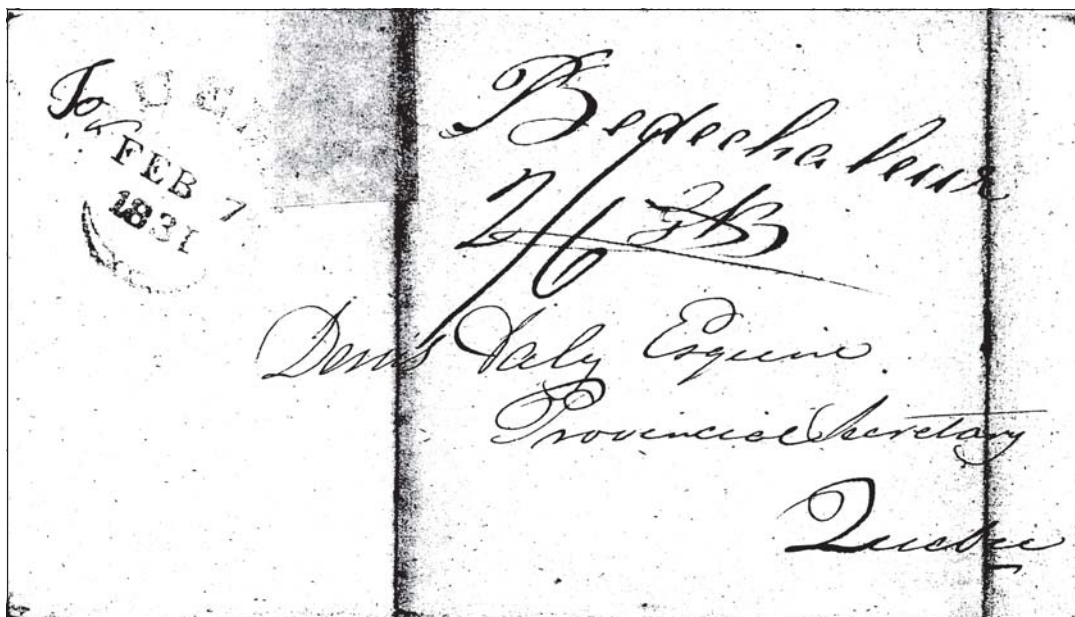


Fig. 4 – Letter written at New Carlisle by Awasa Bebee, Clerk of the Provincial Court for the Lower Gaspé District.  
COURTESY – LAC, RG 4, Series A-1, vol. 346, cover no. 831.

genealogical research on the Mann family shows that there was no J. B. Mann listed in that period<sup>6</sup>.

The few known letters that were mailed from this office illuminate the procedure used by the postmaster to postmark the mail. There are two letters on which only the rate marking is found. A cover dated January 18, 1806 (Fig. 3) shows the rate of 5 shillings, while the other, dated January 17, 1819, shows a double rate of 6 shillings<sup>12</sup>. Following that, a letter written on December 27, 1830 exhibits the manuscript postal marking “Bedecheleur 2/6 GB” (Fig. 4). Finally, there is a cover dated April 29, 1830 (Fig. 5) which shows an impression of an official Bay Chaleur handstamp that had been ordered from England on November 13, 1828<sup>13</sup>.

As was the case for the other members of

the Mann family, Edward Isaac was a Loyalist from New York State. He was born at Stillwater on November 27, 1766. His father was Colonel Isaac Edward Mann (1723–1803)<sup>6</sup>. On the list mentioned above “the nominative state of the Loyalists and . . . June 9, 1784” it is written that Isaac and brother Mann embarked on the brig *Polly*<sup>14</sup>. The brother in question was surely Thomas Mann (1754–1831)<sup>6</sup> who was sheriff of the Gaspé Peninsula from 1784 to 1829<sup>10</sup>. In 1787 Edward Isaac occupied lands to the east of the Indian village of Pointe-à-la-Croix, at a place called Restigouche. It is well to recall that he used these lands even before he had acquired title to them, which he did in 1826<sup>15</sup>. He was married in 1799 in New York to Ann Shipman. Ten children resulted from this union, most of whom were born in Restigouche or in



Fig. 5 – The addressee of this cover was William Franklin Odell (1774–1844), Secretary of the Province of New Brunswick.

COURTESY – C. Faucher and J. Poitras.

Pointe-à-la-Croix<sup>6</sup>. It seems that he was financially well-off, since he sold his manor house and lands in 1824 to Robert Christie<sup>16</sup>. Edward Isaac Mann died at New Carlisle around 1830<sup>6</sup>.

The fact that Edward Isaac Mann died at New Carlisle raises a question. Was he postmaster only at Restigouche during those years (1804 to 1830)? This seems not to be the case. For the period between his appointment and 1826 it seems certain that the post office was located there, as proven by this notice which appeared in the *Quebec Gazette* of January 5, 1826: "A mail for Metis and Restigouche will be made up..." For subsequent years there is a lack of information concerning the location of the office, with the exception of one archival document. There exists a table of rates produced by Stayner on January 6, 1830 which stipulates a cost of 2 shillings 6 pence (2/6) to mail a letter between Quebec and Carlisle (Baie Chaleur)<sup>17</sup>. This shows without doubt that the office at Restigouche was closed some time between 1826 and 1830, and that a new office was opened at New Carlisle for a very short time thereafter up to the end of 1830.

The cover which shows the manuscript postmark Bedechaleur 2/6 GB (Fig. 6) is somewhat enigmatic. Could it be that Edward Isaac Mann died before the end of the year 1830, and that a postmaster having the initials GB succeeded him for a short period? This is a possibility, but no answer to the question has been found.

Edward Isaac Mann was an important individual in his community. He became Judge of Common Pleas in 1788. In the following year he became a member of a land committee distributing property rental certificates to Loyalists. He occupied different offices, as mentioned in the *Quebec Almanac*. From 1792 to 1794 he was a land agent, and served in the militia as a lieutenant for Cox Canton. From 1795 to 1828 he sat on the bench as a Justice of the Peace. From 1812 to 1821 he held the rank of Captain in the Restigouche militia. Following that and up to 1828 he was a major in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the Gaspé District. From 1813 to 1819 he was master culler and measurer of timber. From 1821 to 1829 he oversaw the maintenance of the roads. He was also a tradesman<sup>19</sup>. As a concluding

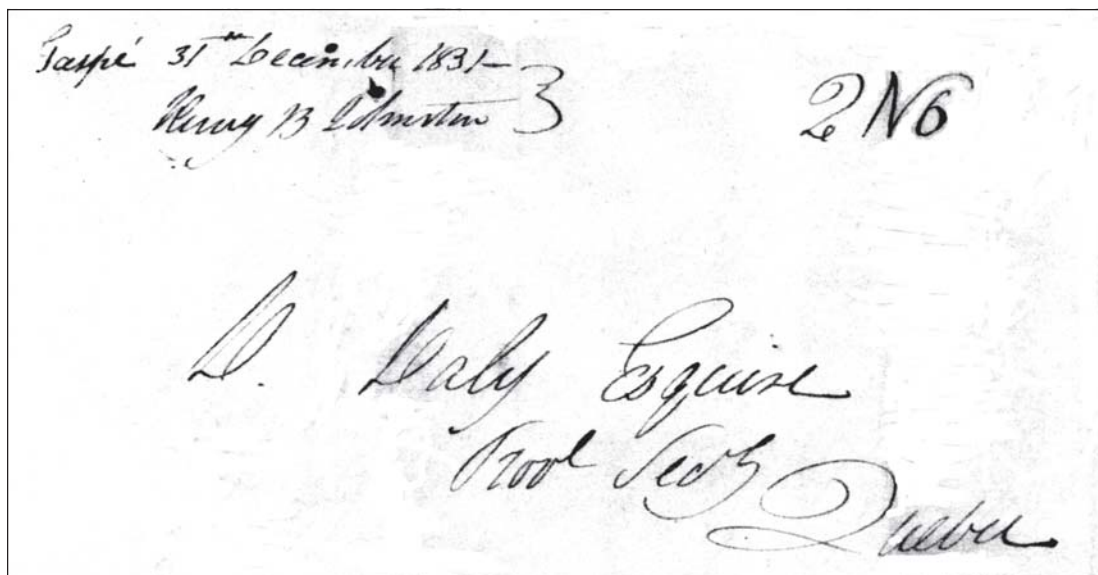


Fig. 6 – Manuscript postmark dated 31 December 1831 with the signature of postmaster Henry B. Johnston.

COURTESY – LAC, RG 4, Series A-1, vol. 371.

remark on this individual, it is interesting to note that he submitted to the Governor the first plans for the construction of a road in the Matapédia Valley <sup>15</sup>.

### Carleton

On February 23, 1831, Stayner appeared before the Special Committee of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada, on which occasion he stated that he had appointed a postmaster at a place called Richmond on Chaleur Bay. Furthermore, he stated that this postmaster had, under his authority, lately established a postal route (sub offices) with different postmasters, which extended from Carleton to Pointe-aux-Maquereaux, a distance of 60 miles<sup>20</sup>. Stayner presented a report in January 1832 in which he gave a list of the sub offices thus placed in operation,

which reported to the office at Chaleur Bay. There was mention of the offices of New Richmond, Bonaventure, New Carlisle, and Paspebiac<sup>21</sup>. Finally, on June 11, 1834, in a letter sent to Mr. Francis Freeling of London, Stayner informed us that the principal office was located in the village of Carleton, and that it had been established on January 1, 1831<sup>22</sup>.

In the *Quebec Almanac* of 1831 to 1837 the office is again called Baie-des-Chaleurs. By contrast, it is interesting to note that all known postmarked mail shows the name Carleton in manuscript, in order to name the village in which the office was located. The name of the district was no longer used, with the exception of the impression of the metal stamp reading “Bay Chaleur” dated on September 30, 1832<sup>23</sup>. At the beginning of 1831 the mail was postmarked by writing “Carleton Chaleur Bay” on it; the cover which shows this procedure is dated August 30, 1831. This practice seems to have been used

only briefly, for around the month of November 1831 only the word "Carleton" was written<sup>24</sup>. This postmarking procedure lasted until the 1837 introduction of an official metal stamp. As for the sub offices, it seems that no postmark was applied to the mail deposited and received at these locations so long as they did not become true post offices.

The 1831 *Quebec Almanac* mentions only the name Crawford as postmaster; the given name is omitted. The name of James Crawford appears in the editions of 1832 to 1837. This is not completely correct. As explained above, it must be remembered that the *Quebec Almanac* was not an official publication – it seems that corrections were not always communicated. In a letter dated June 11, 1834, Stayner indicates having named a certain M. Crawford as postmaster at Carleton in January of 1831. Furthermore, he mentions that the latter had a few years later given the post office and all pertinent documents over to M. Meagher<sup>25</sup>. We know that Meagher occupied this position from the beginning of 1833. In support of this statement, he had received a letter from Stayner, dated in March 1833, in which Stayner made inquiries on the subject of the dues collected at the Carleton post office<sup>26</sup>. Joseph Meagher was still performing the duties of postmaster in 1837.

In 1824, the engineer James Crawford, on the orders of Governor George, Earl of Dalhousie, explored the Matapédia Valley for the purpose of building a road there. As well as being an engineer and postmaster, Crawford occupied several other positions. The *Quebec Almanac* informs us that he was a Justice of the Peace at New Richmond from 1825 to 1832. He became Commissioner of Oaths from 1826. During that same period he performed the duties of fisheries officer and

Commissioner of Fisheries on the Restigouche River in collaboration with New Brunswick. Finally, in 1830 and 1831, along with William Cuthbert and Pierre Poirier, he received the sum of £150 for overseeing the construction of a road between Bonaventure and New Richmond.

Joseph Meagher, of Irish stock, was born around 1803 at Carleton. It appears that he was the son of John Meagher and Anastasie Dugas of Carleton<sup>28</sup>. His first marriage took place on March 27, 1829 to Mary Anne Mann, daughter of Edward Isaac Mann, and nine children were born to them. He was remarried on February 2, 1848 to Mary Ann Mowatt of Carleton, who gave him five children. He was buried at Carleton on August 9, 1877<sup>6</sup>. In addition to his work as postmaster, Joseph Meagher occupied several other positions, some of which are mentioned in the *Quebec Almanac*. He was Commissioner of Oaths from 1837; during that same period he took affidavits. He attended to Oaths of Allegiance for Carleton. Finally, he served as a Justice of the Peace.

This completes the study of the post offices of the Chaleur Bay District for the period ending in 1837.

### ***Gaspé District***

A study of the *Quebec Almanac* tells us that, on its opening, the first post office was called Gaspé, and this name persisted up to 1816. It does not appear in the 1817 edition. In 1818 and 1819 we find the name Gaspé Bay. In 1820 it is called Douglastown. It again takes the name Gaspé Bay in the years 1821 to 1830, and finally, from 1831 to 1836 it is again called simply Gaspé. The only reported postmark found on letters mailed from this district shows the word "Gaspé" written in manuscript (Fig. 6). This is true for the entire period right up to 1837.



### ***Douglastown***

George Heriot signed a letter on November 6, 1802 which appointed Henry Johnston to the position of postmaster for the Gaspé District and of Chaleur Bay. The 1803 edition of the *Quebec Almanac* does not list any post office for this region. This is likely due to the fact that Heriot had not sent the information in time, or had neglected to send it, which should have been received by printer J. Neilson in December 1802 in order to include it in the 1803 edition. In the following year Henry Johnston is shown as the postal official for the Gaspé District office. Note that in the *Quebec Almanac* the family names Johnson, Johnston, and Johnstone were all used to denote this person.

The letters recorded between 1812 and 1821 do not show the word “Gaspé” written in manuscript, but only the rate<sup>30</sup>.

In 1799, Henry Johnston married Charlotte Macpherson, daughter of Loyalist Daniel Macpherson, and settled at Douglastown on a lot donated by the last-named. From 1806 to 1809 he was co-owner of three schooners. Around 1810 Henry Johnston bought a fishing post at Point St. Peter from his brother-in-law John Macpherson. It was at this location that the oldest of his sons, Henry Bisset Johnston, settled in 1825<sup>31</sup>. It is probable that Henry Johnston began to act as postmaster toward the end of 1802.

Information gathered from the *Almanacs* gives us some knowledge of his involvement in the community. From 1797 to 1807 he occupied the office of Clerk of the Provincial Court for the interior of the Gaspé District. From 1812 on he was a Justice of the Peace. In the following year he became a captain in the Gaspé militia. From 1816 to 1820 he was a captain for Gaspé and Point St. Peter. Following a reorganisation, in 1821 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in

the 1<sup>st</sup> Gaspé Battalion. He was appointed a customs officer in 1819. Three years later he was given the additional task of commissioner in charge of ensuring the repair of churches. To complete the list of his numerous positions, on October 25, 1811 Governor Georges Prévost named him a School Commissioner in Douglastown. He occupied this position, as all his others, up to the month of October 1824, when he died suddenly<sup>32</sup>.

In the light of information obtained, it seems that the first post office in the Gaspé District was located at Douglastown from 1803 to 1824. To support this statement in a more convincing way, a notice which appeared in the *Quebec Gazette* of March 21, 1821 is quoted: “A mail for Douglastown, Gaspé Bay, will be made up and closed at this office, on Monday next the 26<sup>th</sup> instant at 10 AM”. The notice was signed by Henry Cowan, who was the postmaster at Quebec City.

### ***Point St. Peter***

Following the death of Henry Johnston, it seems that a decision was nevertheless taken to continue to operate an office in this region. Henry Johnston continued to appear as postmaster for the Gaspé District in the *Quebec Almanac* up to 1837, but it was surely his son Henry Bisset Johnston who took up the office. Did he continue to perform the administrative tasks at the Douglastown office for some months after his father’s death? It cannot be stated positively, but it is almost certain that the office at this location was closed, and that a new office was opened at Point St. Peter when Henry Bisset decided to settle there in 1825<sup>31</sup>. As confirmation, there exists a table of rates dated January 6, 1830 which indicates that the postage for a letter travelling between Quebec and Point St. Peter was 2/6. It is the only office mentioned in the

Gaspé District in this rate table<sup>17</sup>. The three recorded letters in this period bear the manuscript word "Gaspé". They were mailed in 1831 (Fig. 6), 1833, and 1834<sup>34</sup>.

Henry Bisset Johnston was just as much involved in the community as his deceased father had been. He held several positions in addition to fulfilling a fisheries post and a postmastership. In the *Quebec Almanac* it is recorded that he was lieutenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Gaspé Battalion at Point St. Peter. From 1829 to 1841 he sat as a Justice of the Peace at the same location. He, along with James Stewart and George Boyle, was named in 1830 and 1831 as a commissioner for the improvement of the road (at a cost of £350) between Douglastown and Point St. Peter. In the year 1833 he spent £250 for the repair of certain roads in Gaspé County. From 1837 he became a commissioner of affidavits.

A reorganisation of the postal service was undertaken at the end of this heroic era which took the Gaspé out of its isolation and which gradually drew it toward a more efficient postal service.

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