

Jacques Cartier's First Voyage, and the Landing at Cascumpec.

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WHEN His Grace the Archbishop of Quebec was here last year, I took the liberty of recalling to his mind that portion of Jacques Cartier's narrative¹ which spoke, of his landing on the first day of July, 1534, at a spot on the north shore of Prince Edward Island, which corresponded with Alberton or Cascumpec Harbor, at the entrance to the Kildare River; and pointed out to him the probable spot,—although the information as to it is meagre indeed, and three centuries and a half had rolled by since then. Many doubts and misgivings as to the accuracy of this historic contention have been expressed within my own hearing recently; and it is to remove them and make the truth on this point better known, that, at the request of the Prince Edward Island Magazine, I have consented to prepare this article.

I have said that the intrepid navigator of St. Malo made a landing on the north shore of Prince Edward Island. Perhaps it will be necessary to add that neither to him, nor to any previous navigator was this land known to be insular in its character; and, as everybody knows, it was not for hundreds of years afterwards called Prince Edward Island,—the latest of its numerous appellatives.

In our histories—so often inaccurate—it is said that John or Sebastian Cabot was the first discoverer of Prince Edward Island; looking in upon it on June 24th, 1497, and, as that day was St. John's day, calling it St. John's Isle. This is all fiction, pure and simple. Few who have had the opportunity of studying the pieces upon which this claim is based, whether charts or written descriptions, care to defend it seriously. It is now pretty clearly demonstrated, as clearly, indeed, as can any such remote and comparatively unimportant incident in a great voyage of discovery, that the land Cabot called St. John's Island, was none

1. French edition, possibly the Ruen, jealously guarded at Ottawa. The extracts in my possession are certified to by L. P. Sylvan of the Parliamentary Library Staff.

other than Scateri²; his landfall, so much and so commonly discussed in academic circles, being Cape Breton. Dr. Dawson, whose knowledge on this matter is as thorough as it is accurate, has to my mind, lifted the whole vexed question of the landfall, and matters germane to it, out of the region of reasonable doubt.

Cabot, then, did not discover Prince Edward Island. We have no proof that Verrazzano (1525) did, either; although many writers so contend. Of the great navigators, Jacques Cartier is the first who adduces incontestable proofs, not only of having sailed along its coast, indicating many of its geographical traits in his narrative or log; but of having landed upon it from his boats. And this landing is important. On the first of July, 1534, the discoverer of Canada set foot on Canadian soil for the first time, at or near Cascumpec, Prince Edward Island. He had landed before on American soil, it is true, but not Canadian: Newfoundland still being without the jurisdiction of Canada. This is a fact every Islander should remember with pride; while the fortuity of Cartier's landing on that day which is now our national feast—Dominion Day—is worthy of the attention of the curious.

The first great navigator who really found out the insular nature of our Province was Samuel de Champlain (1604),—Cartier had ever regarded it as a portion of the mainland. Champlain rounded it; noted its geographical features; placed it on the map of the new world correctly³; and, from the familiarity which he enjoyed with the old charts and narratives, and the knowledge of an Island having been called St. John's Island by Cabot⁴, and spoken of always—though differently located—by later discoverers; gave it, definitely, that name. Inside the Gulf, then, an island Cabot never saw, bore up to the conquest a name that great navigator attached to another and much less important islet without the gulf on the Atlantic coast of America.

We have been speaking all along, of course, of the great discoverers. It is admitted on all sides, that long before Cabot, Verrazzano, Cartier, or Champlain, the Basque, Breton, and Norman had landed on the north-west shore of Prince Edward

2. Scateri was known for hundred of years after Cabot as St. John's Island.

3. See Champlain's map of 1613.

4. Subsequent cartographers have placed this St. John's Island in a dozen different places on their rude maps.

Island, to dry their cod and try out the oil of the seal, whale and walrus, on its clean, pebble-strewn, wave-laved sand hills. Although the previous record is vague, it is certain that early in the sixteenth century those daring fishermen can be traced all over the shores of the Gulf and up the St. Lawrence as far as the Saguenay. Take Cape Breton alone, and we have the names of the ports frequented by the fishing-smacks of the different European nationalities. The English frequented the Havre-aux-Anglais (Louisbourg); the French, Baye de Ste. Anne (Port Dauphin); the Spanish, Baye aux Espagnols (Sydney); and the Portugese, Mira Bay. On Amherst Island, Magdalens, they call their best shelter for small embarkations, Havre aux Basque to this day, and it is known that there the Basque, Breton, and Norman fishermen of France, and the English whalers, resorted early in this century. Hakluyt states that on one trip of the ship Bonaventure, in 1591, they killed fifteen hundred morses or sea-cows in the Magdalens. These animals were slaughtered in great numbers on our shore also; Sea Cow Pond, near the North Cape, getting its name from their presence there in the hunting season.

But what proofs have we that Jacques Cartier made a landing at Cascumpec. I have secured from the Parliamentary Library at Ottawa, a certified copy of the portion of the famous navigator's narrative, which bears on this point, and intend letting him speak for himself. First it may be necessary to say that Cartier, being duly commissioned by the King of France to explore the new world, and find the much-sought passage to the East Indies, set sail from the port of St. Malo, on April 20th, 1534. On May 10th, he sighted Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland. We cannot follow him among the islands north of that country, through the straits of Belle-isle, and along the desolate Labrador coast back again to western Newfoundland; and then by a south-west course to the Magdalens. Having departed from those islands which Jacques Cartier named and accurately described, on June 29th, he sailed westward; and on Tuesday, the 30th, discovered Prince Edward Island, or land which, to him, appeared like two islands, as he approached it from afar. I translate from the narrative freely.

“The next day, the second last of the month (June), the wind coming from the SSW. we sailed westward until Tuesday morning, the last day of the month, without discovering any land except that at sunset we saw land which appeared to be two islands, which were behind us WSW. about nine or ten leagues. All the next day till the following morning we sailed westward about forty leagues ; and, following this course we perceived that the land which appeared as two islands, was firm land, lying SSE. and NNW. to a very good cape of land called Cape Orleans. All this land is low and flat, the most delightful that can be seen, and full of beautiful trees and plains. It is true we could find no harbor, because the entire coast is studded with sandhills. We went on shore with our boats in several places and among others we entered into a fine river, but shallow; and because we saw so many Indian canoes crossing it we called it the River of Boats. We had no other acquaintance with those wild men, for the wind came on shore and beat us against the coast, and we had to return to our ships. We sailed NE. till next morning at sunrise, when a fog and tempest arose, for which reason we lowered our sails until two hours before noon; when the weather cleared, and we saw Cape Orleans with another distant from it some seven leagues towards the NNE., which we called the Cap de Sauvages (Wild Man's Cape.) On the northeast side of this cape, for about a league, there is a dangerous reef of rocks. While near this cape we saw a man running along the shore behind our boats, which were hugging the coast, and making signs for us to return to the cape (Orleans); recognizing which we began to pull towards him, when he, seeing us approach, fled. Going ashore, we put on a stick before him a woolen scarf and a knife; and this done, returned to our ships. This day we, rounding the land, sailed along the coast; searching out a good port, some nine or ten leagues, which it was impossible to find, so low is the land as I have already said, and so surrounded with sandbanks. Nevertheless we went ashore in four places on that day, to see the trees, which were very beautiful and sweet-smelling, and we found them to be cedars, yews, pines, ashes, birches, elms, willows, and many others to us unknown; all, however, without fruit. The land on which there is no wood is very good,

and full of pease, white and red; myrtles, having the white blossoms on them; strawberries ripe; a wild grain like barley, which looks as if it had been sowed and worked; and this land is of the best temperature that one could desire—and of great warmth. We saw there an infinity of gulls, cranes, and other birds. In a word there was nothing wanting to the land but good harbors.”

From the foregoing description of Jacques Cartier, anyone acquainted with the northwestern coast of this Province will readily recognize in Cape d' Orleans, Kildare Cape; while Cap des Sauvages is none other than North Cape. The ledge of rocks at the latter; the distance between the two; the picture of this coast; above all, the topography of the New Brunswick side which follows,—is as exact as it could be made in writing in those days, and fits into no other section of the gulf shore. The entrance into Cascumpec Harbor and the Kildare River, (le Fleuve des Barques) was not, I think, just at the same spot then as it is today, but broke through the sandhills nearer Kildare; as it now threatens to break through still further east than the present entrance. Kildare River and the bay into which it emptied, was a favorite resort of the Indians for hundreds of years after Jacques Cartier; and well up to its head waters as on Savage Island, called after them, have many indications of long-used camping-grounds been found, even in our days. Nor does the remnant of the Mic-Macs desert it in the present, but under very changed circumstances, still divides its placid waters in summer with the oar which has long since replaced their forbears' paddle. But, everything taken into consideration, it is easy to recognize the first landing place of Cartier on Canadian soil at CASCUMPEC, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, ON DOMINION DAY, 1534.

5. Cartier thought he saw the land interlock down the strait, as he sailed over to the New Brunswick side, giving an accurate description of that shore.

