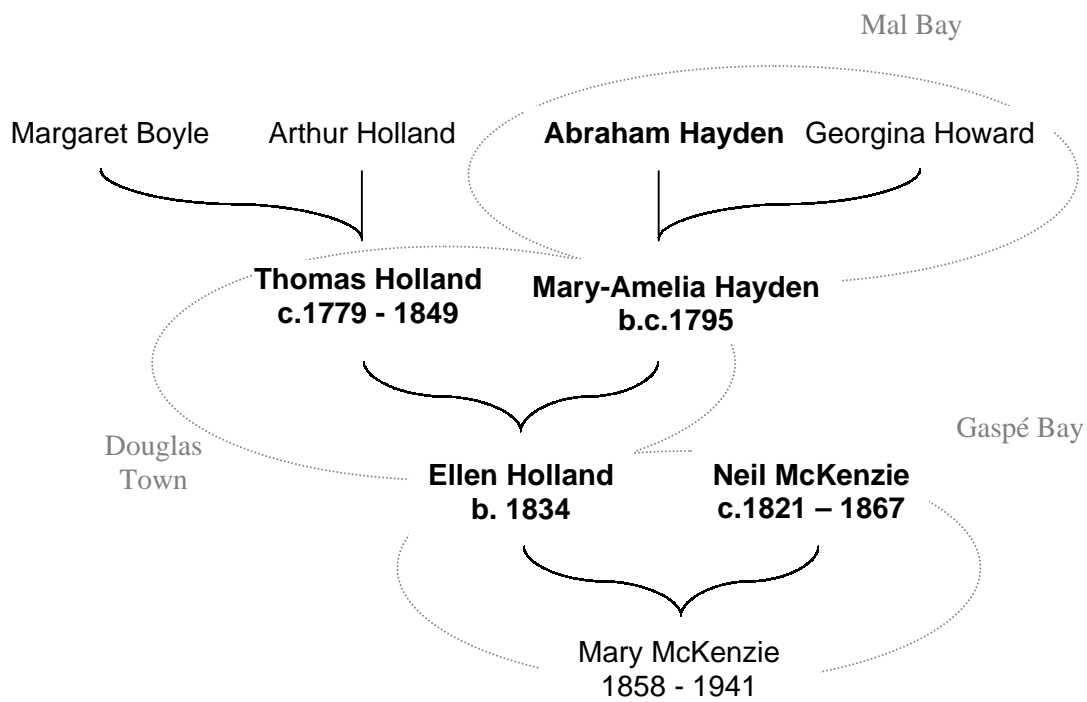


# **Gaspé Ancestors**

The story of the Haydens, Hollands, and McKenzies.



## Who were the Gaspé Ancestors?

Grandpa (Albery Bone) never wrote about his maternal grandmother's family, except that she was born in Quebec, named Mary McKenzie, and married Donald Bain. Grandpa's family had little contact with that side of the family; he passed down some of the Bain family lore, but nothing at all was known of the McKenzies'.

Now we know of three generations of Mary's ancestors. They lived in the easternmost region of Québec on the Gaspé peninsula for about a century prior to Mary's arrival in 1870's Toronto. All of this knowledge comes from church, census and other government records, and centres around the families of Mary's mother Ellen Holland, grandmother Mary-Amelia Hayden, and great-grandfather Abraham Hayden. Using the few records that remain we must build the rest of their story ourselves.

## The earliest Canadian

Mary McKenzie's great-grandfather Abraham Hayden is the earliest of our ancestors known to arrive in what would later be called Canada. We find him in a local census of 1777 on the Gaspé coast near Percé where he declared that he possessed a wife, a boat, and four servants. In the Gulf of St. Lawrence on sparsely populated lands recently won from the French, the Haydens had settled in Mal Bay. Abraham was a fisherman or a fish merchant, no doubt employing those four 'servants' as the crew of his boat. He and his wife Georgina Howard were Irish, and probably Protestant. They remained in Mal Bay at least until 1819 with a family of ten.

Gaspé is the easternmost region of Québec, named by the aboriginal Mi'kmaq, from their word for 'land's end'. First the Mi'kmaq (pronounced Mig-mow) and then Europeans had found the



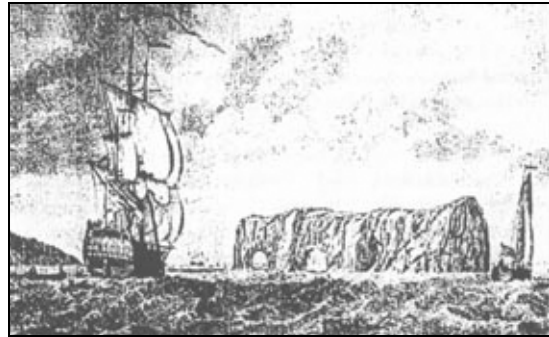
Detail of Joseph Bouchette's 1815 Plan of the District of Gaspé, W. Faden, London. Douglstown is on the mouth of St. John R. Percé is on south coast of Mal Bay.

Gaspé waters ideal for cod fishing and whaling. The current brings fresh water down from the St. Lawrence River to create the warmest ocean waters on the North-Eastern shores of the continent, and the sand bars and stony beaches sweeping out from the red rock cliffs were ideal for dry-curing the catch. From around 1762, after the British conquest of Acadia and New France, the French pêcheurs were replaced by British and American fishing concerns coming from Quebec and New England. Perhaps Abraham arrived among Gaspé's first English speaking settlers – fishermen, merchants and bailiffs (police) who were British ex-soldiers recently discharged in Canada, making a new life on these cod-rich waters.

“By the 1770's the nucleus of the English speaking population between Gaspé Bay and Percé was living in a small number of tiny hamlets scattered along a coast covered with forest. ...There were no doctors or nurses and anyone who was sick was probably treated with remedies made from herbs which could be gathered in the forest.

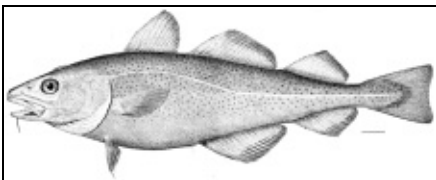
There were no stores except for the buildings where the fishing merchants kept their supplies, and anything that a family could not manufacture, grow or catch had to come by sailing ship during the summer months. There was one Catholic church at Bonaventure and no schools anywhere. ...the children of most families could only learn what their parents could teach them which in most cases was little more than how to fish, hunt, cut wood, cook or sew.” – David J. McDougall , Two Centuries of settlement of the Gaspé Coast by English Speaking People

Mal Bay was just north of the established fishing village of Percé, home of the ‘pierced rock’ le Roc Percé. When the American Revolutionary War began, American privateers targeted the nearby British fishing posts, and many settlers fled to Québec and Montréal to defend those cities. In 1777 only 150 English speaking people remained from Percé north to Gaspé Bay. They setup an armed force of local men including some who had, two decades before, been in the British Militia that captured Louisbourg, Québec City and Montréal. American pirates attacked often, disrupting important supply shipments; and just before the war’s conclusion, Americans attacked Percé and managed to carry off and disable the town’s only two cannon.



Percé Rock circa 1780’s.  
The second hole collapsed in 1845 leaving the one we see today.

Ever since the Revolution began, small numbers of ‘loyal’ Americans resettled in the northern colonies. Whether seeking cheaper land or escaping increasingly unfriendly neighbours, Loyalists were populating the Gaspé coast. Some came to Québec and filled refugee camps, or were organized into British regiments, and at the war’s end the government gave them land to resettle. In 1784, huge numbers of troops and refugees arrived on the shores of Lake Ontario, in Québec and on the East Coast; in all, 3 percent of the population of the southern colonies. They doubled the population of Nova Scotia to the south, necessitating a new province named New Brunswick, and about 500 people came to Gaspé. Most of these settled the flatter lands on the warmer Bay of Chaleur south and west, between Restigouche and Percé. Fewer settled north of Percé on the more rugged coast around the mouth of the St. John River in Gaspé Bay. The Percé area census of 1784 revealed many of the pre-loyalists remained, with Scottish, English, Channel Island, Acadian and French Canadian names, as well as some Irish recently arrived from Ireland on supply ships bringing food for the fisheries.



The Codfish: U.S. National Marine Fisheries  
Historic Image Collection (NMHIC)

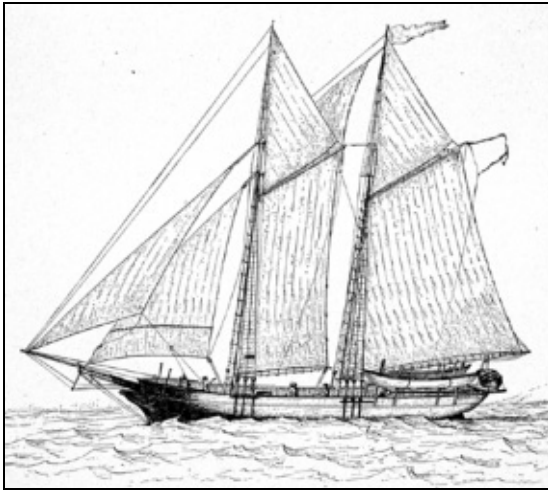
So Abraham Hayden, our earliest Canadian ancestor *may have worked for the post-conquest British or American fisheries and settled in Gaspé, or relocated from the southern colonies as an early-Loyalist, possibly having served in the British army, or immigrated from Ireland on a grocery ship, and took up some land and a boat in Mal Bay, just North of Percé.* He and his wife Georgina had ten children there between 1776 and 1805: Elizabeth,

Mary, Francis, Lydia, Eleanor, Helen, Genevieve, John, Mary-Amelia, and Hannah. Their life was totally dependant on the sea – *their father fished, and what mother couldn’t grow in the garden, they bought from visiting fishing ships, especially the Americans.* They were isolated, lived in tiny fishing villages with no roads between them, and travelled only by forest path or on the sea. *They often saw enemy ships of war. Rarely they were attacked, and their father’s tales undoubtedly spoke of conquests and empires, on whose furthest fringes they made their home.*

## Douglas Town

Abraham's daughter Mary-Amelia (Mary McKenzie's grandmother, born c. 1795), married a fisherman and they lived their lives in Douglastown, a small settlement about 30 kilometres north of Mal Bay. Surveyors designated Douglastown on the south side of the mouth of the St. John River to be the main destination for British refugees north of Percé in 1785. Of the first 25 families, most settlers left or died within less than a generation. These were farmers, and clearing and farming the land was difficult on Gaspé's rocky coasts; the crop failure of 1786-87 increased their misery. Gaspé's Lieutenant-Governor once envisaged its location best for trades people to support the fisheries, but the cod stocks were further south near Percé and the few large merchants who controlled the fisheries didn't seek fishermen from so far. With the threat of revolutionary French-men-of-war after 1792, the population had little incentive to stay. By 1800 Douglastown had shrunk to ten families, and by 1810 there were only six, and yet some remained and a slow increase did follow.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the south coast of Gaspé from Restigouche to Percé, was home to many French-speaking Acadians who had returned from imposed exile. Most of the English-speaking population of Gaspé lived between Percé and Gaspé Bay, and numbered about 900 people. Their slow increase began once the children of those who remained started to marry. Abraham's children married people of varying backgrounds; Elizabeth to an English immigrant (c. 1796), Francis to the son of a pre-Loyalist (c. 1802), both Eleanor and Genevieve to sons of Douglastown Loyalists (c. 1807), and Mary-Amelia also to a pre-Loyalist's son (c. 1808), Joseph Adams, and yet had only one daughter Mary before Joseph *died*.



19<sup>th</sup> C Whaling Schooner (NMHIC)

Mary-Amelia married Thomas Holland in 1815. Thomas had *recently* immigrated from Ireland and was, as almost all the locals were, a fisherman. *It is possible Thomas came to the Gaspé coast with the advent of whaling.* In the fashion of New Englanders of the time, men launched boats from larger schooners and pursued the whales by oar, harpoon at the ready. Boys would later rend oil from blubber by boiling it in large pots, in preparation for its use in lamps, and for lubrication.

They held the marriage in the 10 by 20 foot Catholic chapel of St. Patrick's in Douglastown, constructed in the common area just below front street No.1. In the same year, missionary Abbott Demers donated to the parish a bell recovered from a shipwreck on Gaspé's north coast. Mary-Amelia *was probably of the Protestant faith*, yet Thomas was Catholic, and as the Gaspé coast's population was mostly French and Catholic, they had been better served, if somewhat infrequently, by Catholic missionaries travelling up from Bay of Chaluer since 1783. It was not until the end of the French Napoleonic war that a new mix of immigrants arrived and the English-speaking population swelled.

Once Britain's war with France was ended, and the brief war with the United States abated (the War of 1812-14 mostly affected Upper Canada), the impoverished, overcrowded, and unwanted of Britain plus those recently discharged from fighting in Europe, arrived in droves. During Mary-Amelia's early life, Gaspé's population tripled, and during her young family's time in Douglastown, it tripled again.



Boat landing, fish houses, herring smoke-house, fisherman's dwelling and farm, 19<sup>th</sup> C, (NMHIC)

Mary-Amelia and Thomas had 12 children between 1817, a year of great famine, and 1842: Arthur, Anne-Sarah, John, Margaret, Elizabeth, Thomas, James, Michel, Ellen, Anne, Henry, and Francis-Ann. They had cultivated 8 acres of land by 1825, and by Thomas' death it had grown to 25 acres producing wheat and potatoes, while from the sea they took herring. *They likely had a town lot of 1-4 acres, and the use of part of a country lot a short distance away.* At age 10, Arthur was attending a Royal School in Douglastown, one of many in the province that served mainly the English, and yet it closed the 1830's for lack of funding. Few in the village could afford a book with which to equip their child for school. Arthur's younger brother Thomas, born too late and *probably too poor* to attend school, remained illiterate into adulthood.

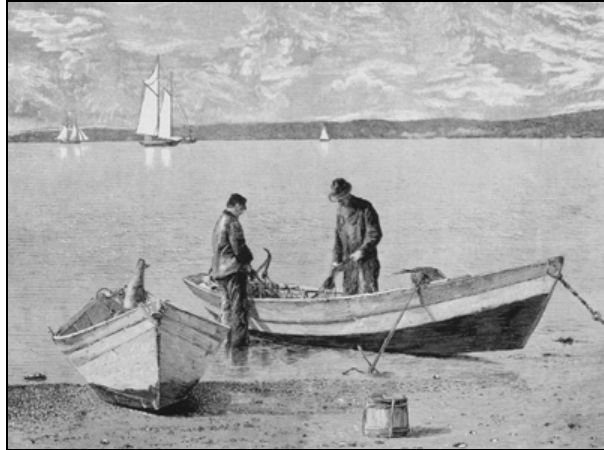
"...At the summit of the slope appears the steeple of the little chapel, whose body is hidden by a bouquet of firs. Debarking, we take the same direction, amongst stacks of cod and the joyous cries of the honest citizens of Douglastown. In a moral sense, this is one of the best missions of the Gaspé district. The population is polite, intelligent and religious; presenting a social physiognomy different from all surrounding settlements. This marked difference must be regarded as an effect of instruction, which is generally widespread amongst the inhabitants of Douglastown; for many years they have considered it necessary to have a good teacher amongst them." – A visitor to Douglastown in 1836, from "Soirées Canadiennes" 1861.

"I remember when we were young, getting up early in the morning during the summer and going outside. The smell of the trees was so fragrant, and the birds singing in the trees, not another sound to be heard. There were no cars roaring up and down the streets back then, there were only horses and buggies and maybe a few oxen.

"Douglastown at one time was divided in sections; each person's property was separated by grassy lanes. We had a name for most of them such as Gertie's lane, Robert Rahel's lane, Eddie Rooney's lane, David Kennedy's lane, Edmond Condon's hill and not to forget Mr. Bill's hill. Strange situation, but I liked walking in those grassy lanes over ruts left by horse and cart.

"I remember once I was going home from the store by Gertie's lane. One stretch of woods where we had to pass was overgrown by trees which made a covered in path. As I stealthily walked along the path, I was shocked to see a man lying in the woods as if lifeless. Believe me my feet hardly touched the ground from there up the hill to our house. Breathless I tried to tell my father that I had seen a dead man down by Gertie's lane. Needless to say, my father went to see what I thought I saw. I was only 8 or 9 years old. It turned out to be an inebriated man (no names mentioned). I guess he couldn't make it any further. Memories and incidents are too numerous to mention. It would take ages to write about all the happenings in my life back home. After all I am an Octogenarian, I'm lucky I can remember anything." – Recollections of Bygone Days, Lucy Condon Briand, referring to early 20th Century

“I had begun a life of hard work at the age of twelve. I began to fish. The main fishing grounds was Anticosti Island; leaving home about the first day of June, to return in the early part of October. This was the only means of livelihood, so each man built himself a boat, took his sons, if he had any, or got a neighbour to join him in the season's catch. The food consisted of dry hard biscuit and cold water during the fishing hours. When the day's fishing was over each man had to split and make his own fish and cook a supper of fish and potatoes, the potatoes being taken along from home. Hard biscuit was the desert during the fishing season; bread was not to be had until we returned in autumn to our homes.



Herring fishermen landing their gill-nets after a night's fishing, 19<sup>th</sup> C (NMHC)



Gravestone of Elizabeth Walsh, wife of Arthur Holland, Douglastown. Photo M. Bone 2000

“Usually a young boy or an old man was kept to spread and turn the fish on flakes made of dry boughs, while the good, smart and healthy men fished. One could not "jump" the job to search for another one; there was no better one, but there were very few complainers; each man did his work and always found time to have a smoke from "leaf tobacco" that raised a strong odour but was greatly enjoyed.” – told by William J. Rooney in “The Recollections of an Irish Gaspesian”

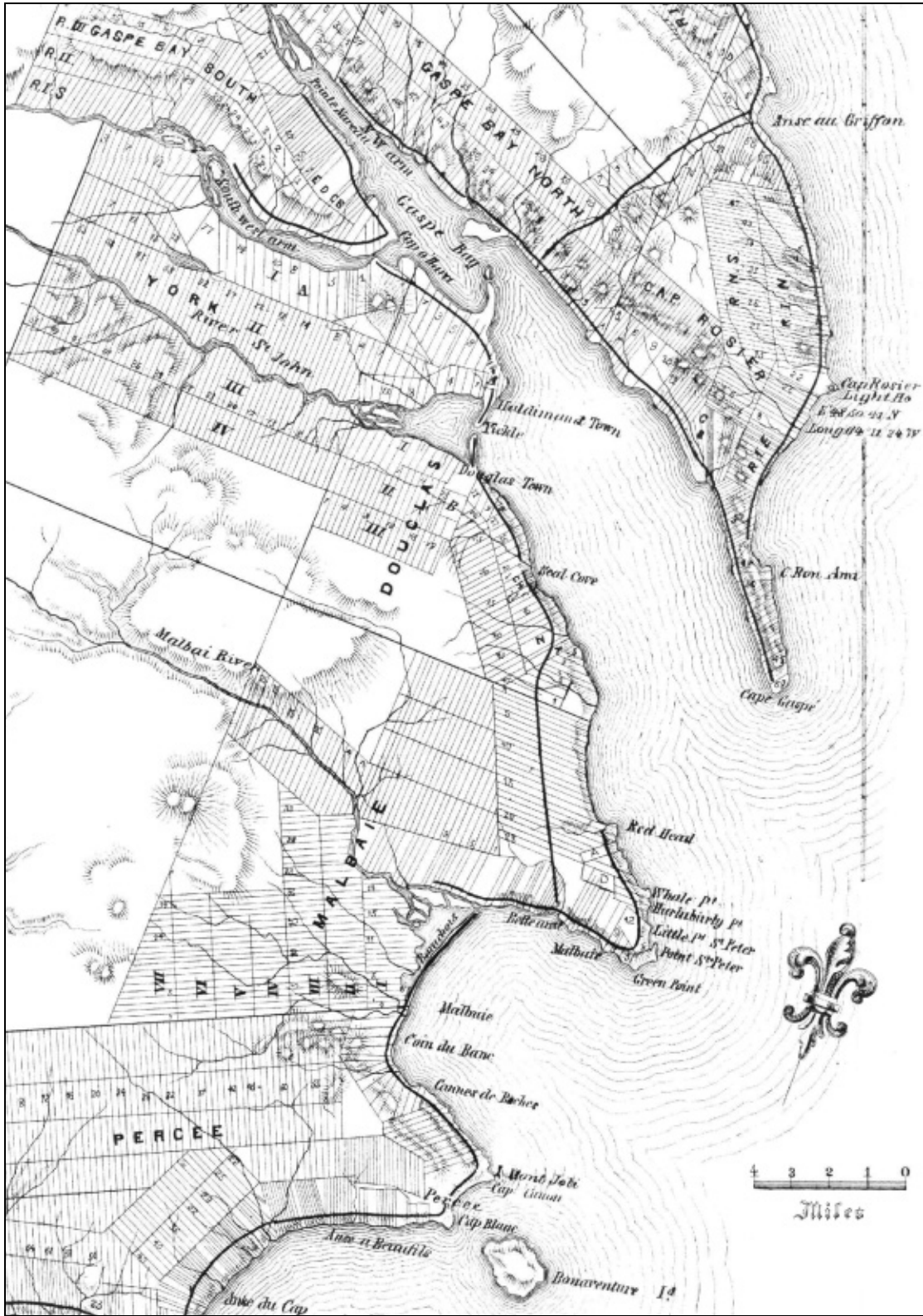
Thomas Holland died in 1849, and Mary-Amelia was still living in 1861. Aside from a few records, little evidence of their family exists in Douglastown itself. No burial records have been found, and their habit of erecting more crosses of wood than stone in the cemetery left few visible memorials; only the grave of Arthur’s wife Elizabeth Walsh exists there today.

Most of Thomas and Mary-Amelia’s children married and remained near Douglastown, including Arthur and his brothers who eventually turned more to farming than fishing. His sister Ellen (Mary McKenzie’s mother, b. 1834) married Scottish immigrant Neil McKenzie north of Douglastown, in the settlement on Gaspé Bay’s Southwest Arm.

## Gaspé Bay

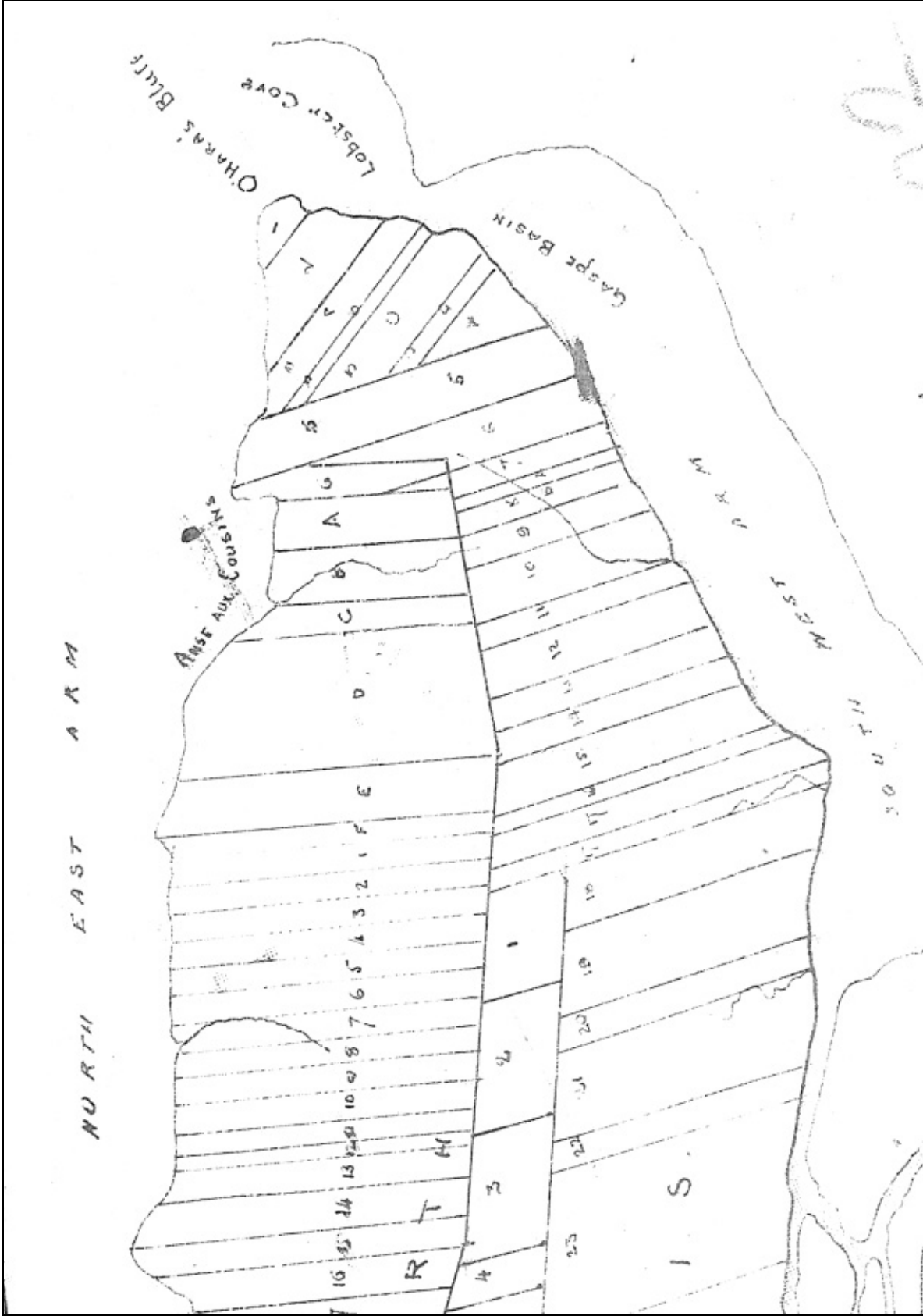
In the 1840’s a new wave of immigration brought many Irish and Scots to Gaspé. Neil McKenzie likely fell victim to the Highland clearances. Although the clearances began in the 1760’s with large-scale evictions and emigration of Scotland’s Gaelic-speakers, it continued into the 1800’s as lowland farming spread north and Highlanders forced into marginal and fragile industries chose North America as their refuge. We don’t know why Neil chose Gaspé. *Perhaps he had a maritime background, or a fondness for life on rugged sea coasts, like the northern coasts and the western islands of Scotland that were his first home.*





Detail of Map of the District of Gaspé, E. E. Taché, 1861. Township names are shown. Note the roads were only forest paths before 1850. Also, note the Village of Gaspé should be shown just west of Cap O'Hara on Gaspé Bay.





Map of Gaspé Bay South Township, Gaspé County, Census of 1861. National Archives of Canada NMC 1333 H3 330.  
 Neil McKenzie's farm was on lot 2, near O'Hara's Bluff, though whether it fronted on the Northwest or Southwest Arm is unclear.  
 Gaspé Village formed on the coast along lots 3 & 4 near Lobster Cove and Gaspé Basin

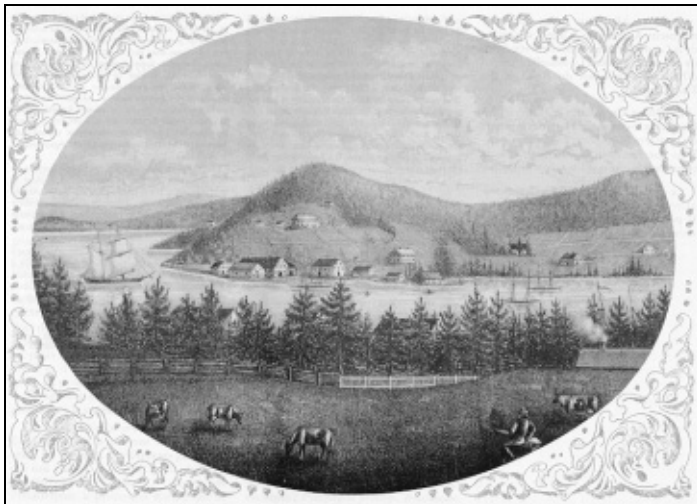
When *Neil arrived around 1843*, he found Gaspé peopled by a fragmented mix of Mi'kmaq, French, and British, both of long surviving and recent stock, thinly spread among the rocky, forested shores. He landed in Gaspé Bay, the northern-most part of the English-speaking coast. Further north beyond Cape Gaspé lies the barren north shore on the St. Lawrence River, and to the south beyond Cape St. Peter is Mal Bay. Three rivers feed into Gaspé Bay, dividing it into three distinct arms; bounded by steep forested hills, only the shores of these inlets were dotted with farms and fishing hamlets. Joined only by the sea, each community retained the uniqueness of the settlers' customs, languages, accents, religions and employs.

The Northwest Arm was fed by the Yarmouth River. Only 30 families lived here; most farmed, but there were some whalers, millwrights, carpenters, and a stonemason.

Neil settled on the edge of the Southwest Arm, the outlet of the York River. This was the more populous, diverse and economically promising of the three inlets. There was no bridge connecting the two sides at the narrow end of the basin, yet boats were prolific. On the south shore was Gaspé Harbour, a community of whalers and farmers; there was a miller, shipbuilder, and customs collector. Directly across on the north shore was the Village of Gaspé, an administrative centre and home to several church and government officials, building tradesmen. Stretching along

the inlet on both sides were many farms. About 70 families lived on the Southwest Arm, and although its main industry was whaling, relatively few were full-time whalers; more than three quarters of its families were farmers.

East and south along the coast from Gaspé Harbour is Sandy Beach and its long shallow peninsula stretching into the bay. Further still is the St. John River, whose delta and inlet is almost totally blocked by long thin sandbars, and the communities fixed on either side; Haldimand on the north, and Douglastown on the south.



Looking across the Southwest Arm to Gaspé. Thomas Pye, 1866.

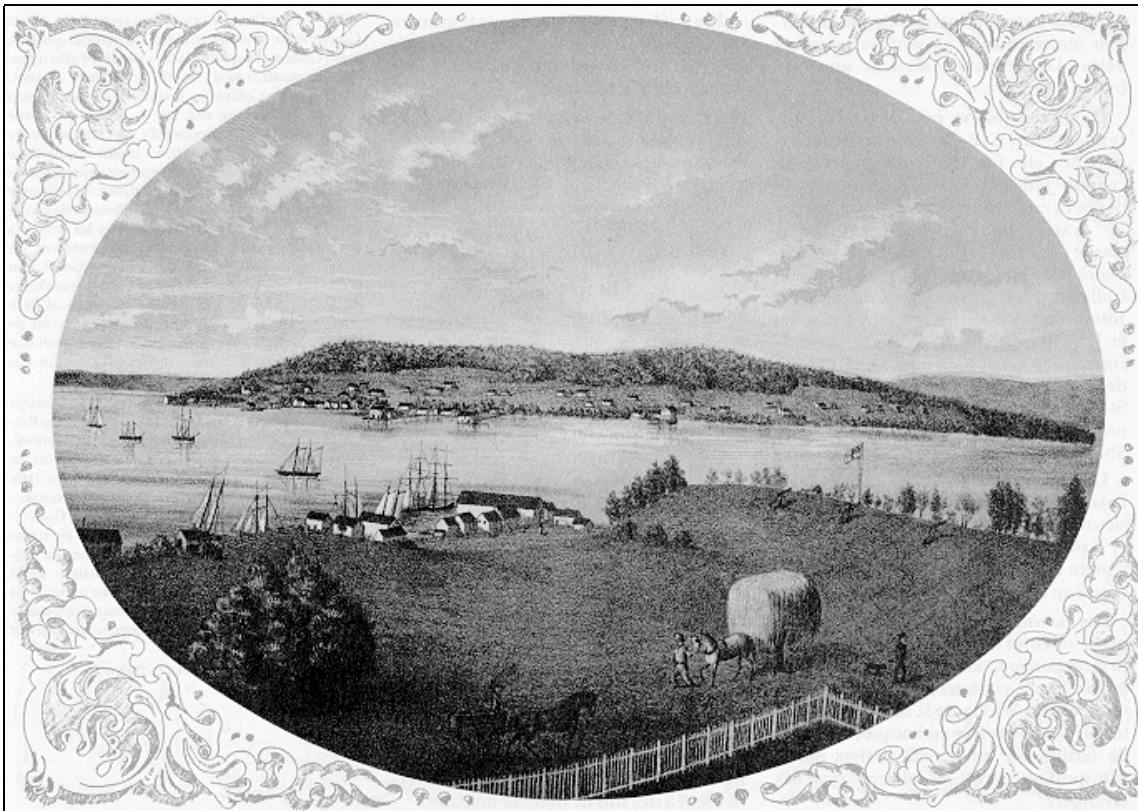
*In his first year on the Southwest Arm, Neil married Mary McKenna, daughter of Patrick McKenna, a farmer near Gaspé Village. They had four children: Helen, John, Patrick and James, but Mary died soon after James' birth.*

In 1854, Neil married Thomas and Mary-Amelia Holland's daughter Ellen, and the couple had five more children: William, Thomas, Mary, Amelia and Alexander. In 1861, they were recorded on the census as living in Gaspé Bay South, concession 1, lot 2, *adjoining Gaspé village near O'Hara's Bluff* at the end of the inlet. Neil held 270 acres, of which 75 acres lay in lot 2, with the rest elsewhere, yet only one tenth was cleared and cultivated. As with most land in Gaspé, the majority of each lot was wild woodland stretching up the sides of the substantial hills. The McKenzies grew wheat, oats, and potatoes; cut wood, produced hay, pork and salted fish; owned an ox, a horse, 2 pigs, 9 sheep from which they made flannel, and 5 milking cows from which they made butter. One each of a house, barn, carriage, wagon and plough completed the tally of their implements.

The family remained on their Gaspé farm for about 25 years, the time known as Gaspé's "Golden Age". The fisheries, shipbuilding, whaling and lumbering industries grew, as did the population. About half spoke English, and the number of English speakers in the province as a whole reached an all time high of 25%. Steamships began to replace schooners for the carriage of freight, passengers and mail during the summer, and roads were built all round the entire peninsula. Shipping volumes rose when Gaspé became a duty-free port for trade with the United States, and its general prosperity was recognized by the Bank of Quebec which built its third branch in Gaspé.

The boom, of course, did not last. The coming of steamships reduced demand for locally-built sailing ships, as did the oil wells' petroleum products replace the need for whale oil. When free-trade ended in 1866, Gaspé's prospects were fading. When world-wide depression struck, they vanished, and the people began to leave. Many families, mostly the English-speaking ones, left for the cities in Quebec, Ontario and the States, including the McKenzies.

By the mid 1870's Neil was dead and his children from his first marriage had married or otherwise left the Gaspé farm. Ellen McKenzie (nee Holland) moved herself and the *five children* west to Toronto and by 1877 she was living there, sharing with several others at 17 St. Nicholas St. Shortly after their arrival, Mary McKenzie married a carpenter whose father had also died recently, and whose mother had brought him and his siblings to Toronto – Donald Bain.



Looking across the Northwest Arm to the Village of Gaspé. Thomas Pye, 1866.  
The McKenzie's farm was just beyond the third boat from the left.