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Fort La Joie

A Gay Centre

In Early Days

The most interesting relic of French occupation in Prince Edward Island is undoubtedly Fort La Joie, situated at the mouth of the Charlottetown harbour on the farm property of Mr. J.O. Hyndman. Although the surrounding land has been carefully cultivated, the Fort itself has been left intact, with its deep moat all around which, in early days, was kept full of water, with a draw-bridge at the south end. The cellars of the French houses within the Fort are still to be seen, together with huge trees to which the late Robert Harris referred in his descriptive poem;

"In the old Fort, on trench and mound
 The clover pink and daisies grow,
 Where grim stockade and cannon frowned
 Two Hundred distant years ago.

Tree branches o'er the moat are met,
 While roses on the rampart blow
 That spreading hawthorne tree was set
 Two Hundred distant years ago!"

Old French Road

Even the old French road is tracable leading from the place of debarkation; also the evidences of a secret underground passage way which led from the shore to the interior of the Fort. Such relics of its worn out past as cannons, uniform buttons, etc., are carefully preserved by the owner.

From a booklet on Fort La Joie issued a few years ago through the courtesy of Mr. Hyndman, we quote the following interesting passage:

Abbe Bresley's Mission

"The history of the Fort starts when the first missionary, Abbe Bresley came to work among the Indians of the Mic-

mac tribe who were living on the shores hunting the woods and fishing in the streams which surrounded the Fort. He was a gentleman of quality and address. And had been attached to the personal service of the "Grand Monarque"; had seen life in courts and palaces and at Versailles had been one of the throng of nobles and high dames about the king. Something of the ardour of the intrepid Brebeuf and heroic Jogues burned in his veins and had caused him eagerly to seek work amongst the savages in the new world. He had been cure at Montreal and missionary among the Indians of St. Louis, when he went to Fort La Joie in 1771. The church Registers there, established by him, are still in existence, and give some valuable clues as to who filled life's busy round in this remote corner of the earth, when Louis XV, was King.

Colorful Scenes

"On the fourteenth of July, 1722, a striking and characteristic ceremony took place in the wilderness at Fort La Joie that displayed at once the zeal of the church and the methods of colonization. About two years before a clearing had been made in the green woods sloping to the water's edge by a company organized by Count De St. Pierre, to whom his majesty had granted "Isle de St. Jean," and other territories. Preparations had been made to start a Trading Post for fish and furs. A Governor's House, barracks for a company of Marine, Store Houses, Church named after St. Jean the Evangelist, had been erected in accordance with the old saying that the French started colonization with a guard house and a statistical office.

"There was a Governor and an attendant as at Quebec, having supervision over finance, justice and police. At the time above mentioned beside the rough buildings above enumerated, a

collection of micmac wigwams were pitched near the shore which, with the smoke from their camp fires and the dogs and children playing among the stumps, lent variety to the scene. A couple of vessels were moored close to the shore discharging horses and cattle, provisions and implements, for the settlers. The place was alive with unwonted activity. The micmac warriors were stalking around in all the glory of fresh paint and feathers. While the French officers appeared above the little church in lace cuffs and ruffles, short breeches and scarlet stockings and cocked hats and swords. The ladies were few, but one can imagine when sedately gathering in the sacred edifice in gala dress with high Normandy caps and lace lappets, red and blue corsets, scarlet petticoats and silver crosses.

An Important Occasion

"The occasion of the unusual stir was the baptism of an infant of M. Lou's de la Ponde Denis, Chevalier of the Royal Order of St. Louis, Captain of the Marines and Lieutenant of the Kind of St. Jean, and his wife Louise Chartier de Lothmiere. The Governor, M. Gotteville de Belle Isle, was present and served as god-father and the Countess de St. Pierre, lady of honour to the Duchess of Orleans was god-mother. There were also present M. Robert Portier de Buisson, sub-delegate of the intendant of New France to Isle St. Jean; M. Aubert sieur de Manse of the superior council at Quebec, M. Pierre de Grandpre surgeon-Major; M. Gabriel de la Bonne, second surgeon; M. Louis de la Bretesche, office of Marine and Major of court; M. Francois Pastereau, commissariat officer; M. du Bullion, Cadet of the Company of Gotteville; M. Thomas, Master of the Port, and others. The enumeration of these names shows the curious mingling here of court and savage life; the fashion and culture of Paris jostling with the wild and rough aboriginal existence shows life in vivid contrast.

Friendship With Micmacs

"At a later christening, De Chevallier de Mezillac acted as a god-father to a micmac, while a dusky beauty of the woods was god-mother. The policy that dictated such acts, readily accounts for the close brotherhood between the French and the Indians, a connection that British power was never able to break. It has been said that while one nation presented the point of a sword to the savages of the New World, the other upheld to

them the virtues of the cross. It may give one a better idea of human nature when it is remembered that the micmac savages never betrayed those who they considered their friend; a generation later a reward was set on the head of LaLoutre, yet he travelled the wilds of Nova Scotia in perfect safety with Indian guides and companions.

In 1723 Abbe Bresley was removed from Fort La Joie and his place was taken by members of the Franciscan Order, some fathers of which have just founded a house at Louisburg. Brother Dulmijon, animated by a brilliant zeal in the service in his church and order served under severe conditions, with rations of a soldier, sandals instead of shoes and clothed in a gown of coarse grey drugging, gathered at the waist by a coarse leather thong.

"In 1728 the first census was taken. At that date there were 336 whites on the Island, 14 families being of Fort La Joie. A second census took place in 1735, when the population of Fort La Joie had increased to 144 and the Island to 541.

Subsequent History

"The commercial company organized by Count St. Peter expended large sums of money in developing their property, but instead of enriching them their venture was unfortunate; the Company was broken up and in 1730 the Crown of France resumed direct control of their grants. A new Governor took charge and the work of settling and developing the Island was going forward surely but slowly under the French flag, until 1774, when England taking a hand in the war of the Austrian Succession, hostilities between France and England were resumed and after a number of years of gorilla warfare the French power in America fell when Quebec and Louisburg fell. At this time there were about 3000 French inhabitants on Prince Edward Island and about one-half of them returned to France, the remainder being dispersed throughout Acadia or finding an asylum in Quebec.

"Mr. Michael Francklin, whose conspicuous ability was of great service to the Crown in dealing with Indian affairs, appointed Isaac de Champs as superintendant of the Island in 1768, and later he and a number of other officials arrived at Fort La Joie with materials and mechanics to erect lodgments for the new rulers. In August of the same year Mr. Francklin became Governor and in the next year Mr. Walter Patterson became Governor,—the Island being then made into a separate province"