

Reflections on L'Anse aux Cousins Part 1

The large and rambling farm home where I was born and where I would live throughout my boyhood days, had been built by my grandfather, Felix Joseph Annett. The house stood some one hundred yards up the gentle slope from the unpaved highway that ran along the south shore of the North West Arm of the Bay. The town of Gaspé lay three miles to the east at the junction of the North and South Arms of Gaspé Bay. Our home faced the waters of the Bay with a view of Rosebridge and Peninsula on the far shore. These settlements were backed by a line of wooded mountains which provided a barrier between Gaspé Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. To the Eastward this mountain wall ended dramatically at Cape Gaspé. From the West the Dartmouth River flowed down from the forests of the interior to merge its clear waters with those of the salt, tidal marshlands at the head of the North West Arm.

The three hundred acres of field, pasture and woodland that comprised the Annett farm had been claimed and settled by my great-great-grandfather, William Annett, about the year 1800. The parents of William, William Edward and Elizabeth Siddon Annett, were English born and crossed the Atlantic by sailing ship in 1771. After early, difficult years in Prince Edward Island and on Miscou Island they had moved to Gaspé and established themselves at Peninsula.

William, the second of their four sons, moved across the Bay to claim and share the land fronting on L'Anse aux Cousins with Abreham Coffin of the Nantucket family of noted whalers. In 1819 William made formal claim of his land before the Gaspé Land Commission sitting at Douglastown. Among my treasured papers is the Last Will and Testament of William made just before his death at L'Anse aux Cousins in 1851. In it he willed the farm, where many years later I was born, to his children and their heirs forever.

The original farm home on the property was gone long before my time but my father clearly remembered the house of his grandfather, William George Annett and often pointed out its site to me. It had stood midway across the field between our home and the South West Road which ran along the west boundary of the farm. A spring of fresh water that supplied the needs of the original home still marks the site. Near this spring there remained, in my boyhood, the rhubarb plants of an earlier kitchen garden. A few yards to north of the spring stood a massive pine tree. Like the original home that lone pine is long gone but I suspect that a search would reveal the broad stump marking its location.

The settlement of L'Anse aux Cousins of my youth lay within a broad syncline. The Eastern slope separated it from the town of Gaspé. Beyond the Western slope lay Point Navarre and the marshlands of the river Dartmouth. The settlement was divided by the Mill Brook which flowed along the trough of the syncline to meet the waters of the Bay. In the original land grant of William Annett, this mill Brook was designated as the Western boundary of the farm. The highway, with its surface of gravel, ran along the frontage of the farms, following the rim of the cove. From it the farm fields stretched back up the slope. From it the farm fields stretched back up the slope to the pasture and extensive woodlots at the rear of the farm.

At the North West corner of our farm where the South West Road joined the highway a wooden bridge crossed the mouth of the brook. Upstream from the bridge was a low dam. Half buried on the bank were two massive granite grindstones as a reminder that a water mill had operated at one time in the brook to grind the grain from pioneer farms. Later in time a salmon hatchery had been built beside the dam. My

time the hatchery had been moved to the York on the South West Arm of the Bay The idle hatchery building in the Mill Brook had been converted into tenements for the employees of the lumber mills on L'Anse aux Cousin's point. From the outlet of the dam a wooden flume had been built to carry the water from the Mill Brook down to the mills on the Point. This flume was carried on wooden trestles along the "Slab Road" that ran at beach level along the frontage of our farm.

From the time I was able to explore by myself or with my chum, Lloyd Davis, from a neighboring farm, the Mill Brook was ever of interest and delight. There we built our camps, floated rafts, sailed our model boats, fished for trout in summer and trapped for weasels and muskrats in winter.