

Reflections on L'Anse aux Cousins Part 2

Neighbors- The Cass Family

The traveler to the L'Anse of Cousins of my youth followed a gravelled road along the same route of the paved highway of today. Coming from Gaspé the road led down the long slope of the syncline to level off as it reached the lands about the Cove. Trees crowded the road on either side until one reached the area above the Point. There the lumber company had cleared away the trees and built two large homes for the use of its managers. In my youth two Calhoun families lived in these houses – the Orly Calhoun family in the upper house and the Harris Calhoun family in the lower. These homes had a fine view over the Point below them and beyond that over the full sweep of the North West Arm of the Bay. Both families have long since gone but John Calhoun who settled in Campbelltown. N.B. has kept in touch with Mother and Dad through the years and still does. Tom Calhoun was associated for most of his career with the Clarke Steamship whose boats were regular visitors to Gaspé. Ina Calhoun married Dr Guy Fiske, Director of the School of Physical Therapy of McGill. She has also maintained contact with friends of her youth in L'Anse aux Cousins.

Along the highway to the west of the Harris Calhoun house, later purchased by Bert Ascah when he retired as the keeper of the Fame Point Lighthouse station., was the first farm of the settlement, that of the Cass family. As this family were not only our immediate neighbors but related to use through grandmother Annett, the former Jemima Cass, it seems appropriate to record my memories of them at this point.

Though I do not remember the father, Joseph Cass, of the generation of grandfather Annett, I do remember his widow, matriarch of the Cass family of my youth. She had four sons, Allie, Garnet Artie and George and a daughter Adelia, all of the generation of my father and all unmarried. I never met the oldest brother, Irving who left Gaspé to live in Ontario before my time. However, the Cass property was eventually pass into the hands of his son on the death of the last member of the family in L'Anse aux Cousins.

The will of great-great-grandfather William Annett confirms that the Cass farm was part of his original land and was given to his daughter who was a Cass by marriage. As a farm property it was of marginal value for it was small, sloping and with little fertile soil. In consequence the Cass brothers depended in great measure on the fishing of salmon and smelt in season and had, at one time, developed fox-ranching to supplement their income.

Allie, the eldest of the four brothers at home, is remembered as a skilled woodworker and boat-builder. In his workshop, beside the barn, he had circular wood saws and a planing machine powered by a stationary engine. He sawed and planed lumber both for his own use and that of his neighbours. I recall vividly the sounds and smells of Allie's wood working shop – the staccato bark of the stationary engine with its large fly wheels, the rhythmic slap of the belting that conveyed power to the saws and planer, the drone of planing wood and above all else the pungent smell of the cedar and pine saw-dust and shavings that littered the workshop floor.

With this lumber Allie built "flats" for the fishing of salmon and smelt and graceful cedar canoes for sale to the wardens and guides of the salmon fishing on local waters. Of deeper interest to me and my chum,

Lloyd Davis, Allie's nephew was the Gaspé fishing boat which Allie had outfitted for his summer work of towing pontoons containing live salmon from the coastal net stands to the fresh water fish pound on the York River. As his schedule regularly involved an over-night trip, Allie had built a cozy cabin complete with bunks and cooking facilities. At least once each summer we would have the coveted invitation to join him on one of these over-night trips. I shall recall more of such experiences later in this record when writing about salmon fishing.

Allie was one of only two men of Gaspé that I know of who attempted fox-farming. His ranch, with its high mesh fences, was located at the edge of the woodland which extended down past the crest of the slope at the rear of the farm fields. The venture, with its costly investment had not been successful. During my youth the ranch remained empty and unused.

Garnet Cass had different interests. During the first World War he had enlisted in the fledgling Canadian Air Force and had been posted to distant Texas for flying training. His stories of his travels and experiences in the USA and Canada marked him, in our youthful eyes, as a real man of the world. He had a keen interest in cars and was owner of one of the first in L'Anse aux Cousins. I recall in particular his impressive Buick touring car which he worked at regularly in a garage near the highway. In winter, when in those days no road was open for cars, Garnet would methodically dismantle all the running parts and the motor of the car, clean and oil each part and then put everything back together with painstaking care.

Ever interested in any new invention, Garnet acquired the first radio in L'Anse aux Cousins that I can remember. It had a place of honour in the parlour of the Cass home. I remember that magical black box with its dials and its exposed and glowing tubes. It was a very special privilege for us boys to be allowed to don a set of the attached earphones. In awe and wonder we heard music and voices from such distant and pioneer stations as KDKS, Pittsburg. As the set was battery powered it was used only with great economy.

A faithful Liberal politically Garnet was always active in the local organization and intrigues of his party. When the Liberals were in power, he usually managed to obtain a government job. For some time he was involved in the control of rum-running. He also served as a fish control officer. Probably it was because of the fact that Garnet ever remained somewhat of a boy in heart and spirit that we were able to relate to him so well.

Of the Cass brother, Artie, who was totally blind through the years that I knew him, was a shining example of how the human spirit can accept and adapt to tragic circumstances. He had not been born blind but had lost his sight in the prime of life while he was working as a lineman on the installation of the first telegraph line in the Peace River District of western Canada. The Society for the Blind had taught him how to read Braille and provided vocational training in the making of brooms and mops. His

brothers had built and equipped a cozy workshop for him just to the rear of the Cass home. Artie enjoyed the company of the young and in his shop Lloyd and I spent many hours. I do not recall ever hearing a word of complaint or bitterness from Artie as a result of his blindness and the obvious restrictions it imposed. He had an unfailing interest in and sensitivity to the people he met and was surprisingly well read. The advent of radio was a particular blessing for him.

The youngest Cass brother, George, was a competent, hard-working farmer and fisherman. He tended the family stand of salmon nets in summer and was active in the Fall fishing of smelt. On the farm he took the initiative in the season round of work ploughing, planting, harvesting, wood cutting and the like. When special activities such as the threshing of grain or the sawing of wood called for neighbourly cooperation, it was always George who was first to offer to help out. But it was the fishing of salmon that probably gave him the most satisfaction. He was an authority on the ways of this splendid fish and on the conditions of water, wind and tide that influenced the fishing. His stand of nets in the lee of L'Anse aux Cousins Point regularly had a good catch and was fished with competence and care. I recall George out in his flat for hours on end in all sorts of weather tending his nets.

Adelia, sister of the four Cass brothers, never married and devoted her life to the care of her mother and her brothers. Deeply religious, she taught the local Sunday school for many years and was active in such good works as the Ladies Guild and the annual appeal of the British and Foreign Bible Society. When sickness or death afflicted friends and neighbours, Adelia was among the first to offer sympathy and help in practical ways. A steadfast Methodist by faith, she was widely respected for her devotion to her family and Christian character.

All these members of the Cass Family that were our neighbours and thus an integral part of my youth are now gone. The farm lies idle and the farm home is closed and deserted. The only reminder of their being is the stone in the graveyard of the United Church cemetery at Gaspé that records their names and dates of birth and death.