

# “Short Cut to America”<sup>1</sup> – The Canadian Steamship Company and the Port of Paspébiac

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*In the closing years of the nineteenth century, transportation of mails, passengers, and goods across the North Atlantic was highly competitive. Although dominated by several large enterprises, there were attempts from smaller operators to enter the business. One factor that differentiated the lines serving Canadian ports from those operating from American locations was the effect of climate, with the winter closures of Montreal and Quebec owing to ice conditions. This paper examines one attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to identify an alternative port that would provide year-round service.*

*À la fin du XIXe siècle, le transport de bagages, de passagers et de marchandises dans l'Atlantique Nord était un secteur très concurrentiel. Bien que dominé par quelques grandes entreprises, des entreprises de plus petite taille ont tenté de se lancer dans le secteur. Un des facteurs qui distinguait les compagnies de navigation desservant les ports canadiens de celles qui exerçaient leurs activités depuis les États-Unis était l'influence du climat, notamment la fermeture hivernale des ports de Montréal et de Québec en raison des conditions de glace. Cet article évalue une tentative, qui a finalement échoué, de trouver un autre port qui offrirait un service à*

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<sup>1</sup> *Western Mail* (Cardiff), 6 September 1898, 6.

*l'année longue.*

The history of trans-Atlantic steamship services across the ocean from Canadian ports to Great Britain has primarily been written (at least in popular literature) as a saga of success with larger-than-life captains of industry and large steamship companies battling for supremacy on the route. There are, however, other stories to be told of smaller and less successful efforts. This paper examines one of those missteps to offer a more balanced account of the development of Canadian shipping during the late nineteenth century. It looks at a shipping company established on the mistaken premise of year-round, ice-free access to St. Lawrence ports. It was a venture characterized by underfinancing and linked to an overly optimistic dream of railway entrepreneurship. It explores the development of the proposal to establish an alternate East Coast harbour to the existing ports of both the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic seaboard. It is also the story of an early attempt to integrate steamer and rail company activities to maximize passenger and freight traffic.<sup>2</sup> While not falling within the strict definition of the Canadian merchant marine by virtue of its overseas incorporation and use of vessels not registered in Canada, owing to its lack of success and as an example of how businesses failed the shipping company deserves to be included in analysis of the merchant marine services available to serve Canadian ports and to carry Canadian goods.

### **The Crowded North Atlantic**

In his 1996 article on the Canadian steam merchant marine, Kenneth S. Mackenzie noted the scarcity of published sources on the history of the country's international shipping.<sup>3</sup> He suggested a number of reasons for this,

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<sup>2</sup> This paper began as a footnote to a more detailed and still ongoing study detailing the struggle to establish winter navigation on the Lower St. Lawrence River and Gulf.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth S. Mackenzie, "'They Lost the Smell': The Canadian Steam Merchant Marine, 1853–1903," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 6, no.2 (April 1996): 1–29. This article, as well as Mackenzie's 1984 CNRS conference paper republished in 2019 as "Our Friends: Loyalty and Competition in the Canadian Liner Trades, 1853–1913," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 29, no.4 (Winter 2019): 359–74, illustrate the limited amount of research that the early Canadian steam merchant marine has commanded. James Croil's book, *Steam Navigation and Its Relation to the Commerce of Canada and the United States* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898) is still a useful, if uncritical, volume for the period up to the time of its publication. Inland and coastal shipping firms are somewhat better served. See for example: Pierre Camu, *La Flotte Blanche: Histoire de la Compagnie de navigation du Richelieu et d'Ontario* (Invenire, 2011), and K.C. Griffin, *St. Lawrence Saga: The Clarke Steamship Story* (published by the author, 2013), <https://clarkesteamship.wordpress.com/>.

citing the Atlantic coast location of the most active research efforts at the time he was writing,<sup>4</sup> the lack of Canadian registrations of vessels used in the trade, and the dearth of Canadian-built vessels in the deep-water operations. Mackenzie provided thumbnail sketches of the largest and most successful Canadian steamship lines that operated in the last half of the nineteenth century: the Montreal-based Ocean Steamship Company (Allan Line), the Mississippi and Dominion Steamship Company (Dominion Line), the Canada Shipping Company (Beaver Line), the Quebec Steamship Company, and the New Brunswick-based Battle Line.<sup>5</sup>

Left unstudied are the many other entrants into the Canadian Atlantic trade, some of which were small and underfinanced and did not remain long in the business. James Croil in his 1898 volume noted a number of other smaller and less well-known companies (most not Canadian-owned) operating from Quebec and Montreal in summer, and various Canadian Atlantic ports in winter. These included Ulster Steamships and the Donaldson, Thompson, Johnston, Elder Demster, and Hansa St. Lawrence lines. These lines provided regular trans-Atlantic service from Eastern Canada to ports such as Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol, London, Belfast, Newcastle, Manchester, Antwerp, and Dunkirk.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the number of lines and vessels, there was appetite for additional services, preferably faster, and for an answer to the perennial problem of the winter closure of traffic on the St. Lawrence River and the seasonality of Quebec and Montreal.

The best routes and the best ports for a trans-Atlantic service between Canada and Great Britain were the subjects of much discussion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At a time when dozens of new railway routes were the object of speculation, seemingly based purely on a casual perusal of maps of the developing dominion, the attraction of a new port was a factor in planning. Many of the proposals featured a relationship with a friendly shipping line that could deliver the volumes of international cargo necessary to render the railway profitable. In 1896, Sanford Fleming, who two decades earlier had been responsible for the completion of the Intercolonial Railway from Halifax to Quebec, published an article discussing a number of routes

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<sup>4</sup> At the time much of the nautical research was in connection with the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project of the Maritime History Group at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

<sup>5</sup> Of these only the Allan Line has received book-length treatment: Thomas Appleton, *Ravenscrag: The Allan Royal Mail Line* (McClelland and Stewart, 1974). I have followed Ken Mackenzie's lead in suggesting that the Cunard Line, in spite of its Canadian origins, was not really engaged in the Canadian trade during this period.

<sup>6</sup> Croil, *Steam Navigation*, 234.

and port options.<sup>7</sup> After looking at both the major routes to enter the Gulf of St. Lawrence – the Strait of Belle Isle separating Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Cabot Strait between Newfoundland and Cape Breton – he concluded that the former, although somewhat shorter, had a much reduced practical value as fog, poor weather, drift ice, and navigation hazards would force vessels to proceed at considerably reduced speeds. However, both routes also would require slower speeds in the estuary of the St. Lawrence owing to the marine traffic, intricate turnings, and the rocks and shallows defining the channel. Only in the open ocean would the high speed of modern steamers be employed to best advantage. At any rate, the river itself was effectively closed to navigation because of ice from late November until April and sometimes May. Fleming favoured Halifax as the eastern terminus for a year-round passenger service that required speed and regularity, while slower freight vessels could use the St. Lawrence for economy in transit for the reduced ice-free season. He concluded: “If the ocean is to be crossed with any degree of regularity from the Dominion to the Mother country and at the same time with safety, every fact and all experience goes to show, that it will be expedient to leave the St. Lawrence to its proper functions, and seek a more suitable route for a fast service from one of the splendid open harbours on the Atlantic seaboard.”<sup>8</sup> Given Sanford Fleming’s connection with the Intercolonial Railway and that company’s existing rail connections with Halifax, Saint John, Louisbourg, and Sydney, and the lack of suitable ports elsewhere on the east coast, it is not surprising that he may have ignored other, as yet undeveloped, routes.

### **A Passage to Where?**

In 1898, the primary steamer port of departure for North America was Liverpool, and steamship lines such as the Allan Line and the Dominion Line went from there to Quebec, Montreal, and Halifax. However, the Great Western Railway, although a major passenger and freight operation in England, did not connect with Liverpool and was effectively squeezed out of the market. The Great Western did have rail access to the deep-water port of Milford Haven in western Wales. Milford Haven had long been famed for the depth and sheltered aspect of its harbour and by 1863 a rail line had been extended to

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<sup>7</sup> Sanford Fleming, “Note on our Atlantic Steamship Service,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (October 1896): 127–47. The article was subsequently published as an offprint pamphlet titled *Steamship Service Between Canada and Great Britain* (Kingston: publisher not identified, 1896).

<sup>8</sup> Fleming, “Atlantic Steamship Service,” 136.



THE NEW DOCKS AT MILFORD HAVEN, SOUTH WALES  
 This new Atlantic port, by means of which the journey from America is considerably shortened, was inaugurated last week by the arrival of the Anchor Line S.S. "City of Rome"

*The Graphic: An Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* (London), 2 November 1889, 528. (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433080417946&seq=633>)

the community.<sup>9</sup> In 1874 the Milford Docks Company had been incorporated to develop the port with a tidal lock that would provide an enclosed area of 60 acres and 2,500 yards of quay length, enough to handle the largest vessels.<sup>10</sup> Delays and financial difficulties hampered construction, but the docks finally opened in 1888, and 10 years later the Great Western Railway extended its services right into Milford Docks, offering the possibility of direct transfer of passengers and goods between the railway and the ships.<sup>11</sup> Anxious to establish a trans-Atlantic service, the Milford Docks Company had, as early as 1881, been in negotiations with American interests to link Milford Haven with a port to be established at Fort Pond Bay on the eastern tip of Long Island, some 100

<sup>9</sup> *Pembrokeshire Herald*, 21 August 1863, 3.

<sup>10</sup> The Pembrokeshire Records Office holds a collection of the records and correspondence of the Milford Docks Company, <http://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb213-d/mdc>.

<sup>11</sup> *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 14 December 1898, 3.

miles to the east of New York City.<sup>12</sup> The discussions continued in an on-again/off-again fashion for more than a decade but a viable connection capable of attracting investors was not established during the time. Finally, in August 1898, the Milford Docks Company announced that it anticipated an early and positive conclusion to discussions for a trans-Atlantic route, although this time it was to a Canadian, rather than American, port.<sup>13</sup>

There was a new partner, the Canadian Steamship Company,<sup>14</sup> which was associated with the Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway (ALSR). The railway dated from 1893 but the steamship company had been formed only in May 1898, when it obtained incorporation in Great Britain. The company built on the interest of Britain's Great Western Railway in getting access to the trans-Atlantic steamer trade. It had a number of prominent English directors, several of whom were also directors of the Great Western Railway.<sup>15</sup> The new line was touted as the fortuitous combination of the interests of a number of parties. The Milford Docks Company sought business for their investment in the port, the Great Western Railway was interested in tapping the opportunities of trans-Atlantic shipping, and the ALSR mirrored the desire of the Great Western to create traffic in North America for their developing rail network. Although the new company originally favoured a connection with Portland, Maine in the winter season, Canadian members of the Canadian Steamship Company board pressed for a year-round Canadian connection.<sup>16</sup>

The principal advocate for the scheme was Charles Newhouse Armstrong (1850–1932),<sup>17</sup> a Canadian capitalist and promoter with a dubious reputation

<sup>12</sup> *London and China Telegraph*, 2 April 1881, 239; *London Evening Standard*, 19 February 1883, 5. As was the case with many other port proposals of the time, Fort Pond Bay remained undeveloped.

<sup>13</sup> "Milford and the Atlantic Mail Service," *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette and Lloyd's List*, 25 August 1898, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Although the name chosen for the company might seem from present perspective to have been designed to benefit from similarity of name with other ventures, it was less easily confused in 1898. The Canada Shipping Company was far better known to the public as the Beaver Line and Canada Steamship Lines did not come into existence until 1913.

<sup>15</sup> The financial arrangements between the entities are not entirely clear. Although the Great Western Railway (GWR) may have had some limited ownership stake in Milford Docks, it was not as a partner in the steamship venture. The GWR's chief contribution to the venture took the form of discounted freight charges to and from the port. On the other hand, it is clear that the steamship company was linked in both ownership and management with the Canadian railroad.

<sup>16</sup> "Line of Steamers for the Dominion," *Montreal Herald*, 20 December 1898, 1. The *Herald* consistently, although erroneously, referred to the firm as the "Atlantic Steamship Company."

<sup>17</sup> "Charles Newhouse Armstrong," *An Encyclopedia of Canadian Biography Containing Brief Sketches and Steel Engravings of Canada's Prominent Men*, vol. 1 (Canadian Press Syndicate, 1904), 93.

and whose exploits included the scandal-plagued manipulation of railway funding for the Baie des Chaleurs Railway. In 1891, this scandal brought down a number of prominent Quebec politicians, including Premier Honoré Mercier.<sup>18</sup> Armstrong had been involved with the construction and financing of a number of short lines in Quebec and Ontario,<sup>19</sup> and in 1893, under the umbrella of the ALSR, Armstrong cobbled together several of these companies and proposed the development of a major line to rival the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific railways with a route running from the Great Lakes to the East Coast.<sup>20</sup> Barely existing, even on paper, the proposal for the line included the imagined acquisition of running rights on competing railways, the completion of a major bridge across the St. Lawrence River at Montreal, and the building of a rail line through the lightly populated wilderness between the Ottawa Valley and a port to be established on Lake Superior.<sup>21</sup> By 1895, Armstrong’s plans had expanded to include a fleet of steamers that would link Paspébiac with ports on the Quebec North Shore, Magdalen Islands, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and – once the Reid company completed the Newfoundland Railway as far as St. George’s Bay – with St. John’s, providing rail and sea service from Montreal to St. John’s in 33 hours.<sup>22</sup> Although he had some experience as a railway contractor and promotor, Armstrong’s real strength appears to have lain in his ability to leverage government subsidies and investor speculation. However, by the late 1890s his level of success as a railway promotor was becoming tarnished and his success in obtaining government funding was behind him.

### The Search for the Fast Steamer

C.N. Armstrong was not a complete stranger to ocean shipping. Through the 1880s, he was in receipt of substantial subsidies for shipping between

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<sup>18</sup> A brief history of the Baie des Chaleurs Railway can be found at “Gaspé of Yesteryear,” Kenneth Annett, 2015, <https://gogaspe.com/host/annett/volume2/>. See also Giles Gagné, “Le scandale de la Baie des Chaleurs,” *Cap-aux-Diamants, La revue d’histoire du Québec* 83 (2005): 20–23. Although a royal commission found that Mercier was not a direct beneficiary of the kickback scheme apparently orchestrated by Armstrong, a number of Mercier’s associates were not so fortunate. Mercier was dismissed by the lieutenant-governor in December 1891.

<sup>19</sup> Among these were sections of the Montreal and Sorel, the Great Northern of Canada, the Pontiac Pacific, the Great Eastern, the Montreal and Lake Maskinonge, and the Lachine and St. Andrews railways.

<sup>20</sup> The original plan for the line saw the Atlantic terminus to be at Cascapédia in Quebec; “Atlantic and Lake Superior Ry. New railway from the Soo to Cascapedia with fast steamships in connection,” *The Evening Record* (Windsor), 23 May 1893, 1.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.canada-rail.colm/quebec/railways/AQWR.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “Closer connection between St. John’s and Montreal,” *Evening Telegram* (St. John’s), 14 January 1895, 4.

Montreal, other Canadian ports, and European ports such as Bremen and Antwerp through his association as Canadian agent or partner with the Hansa and White Cross lines.<sup>23</sup> He also seems to have been involved to a limited extent in the discussions concerning “The Fast Atlantic Service,” a scheme supported at various times by both Liberal and Conservative governments, that would have carried Canadian mails on Canadian routes in order to regain the advantages accruing to the faster and more frequent vessels already travelling to American ports.<sup>24</sup> As Ken Mackenzie notes when discussing the several tender calls on the Fast Line proposals, some of these were from legitimate steamship operators, but “Many others submitted speculative tenders based on expectations of anticipated, but unpromised, government largesse.”<sup>25</sup>

Armstrong and his associates likely fell into the latter category. He had expressed interest in submitting a fast steamer proposal on behalf of the ALSR early in 1894 and requested a 10-year subsidy of \$750,000. This proposal was generally accepted by the government as open to consideration.<sup>26</sup> However, one part of the scheme was, at the time, a non-starter. Mackenzie Bowell, minister of Trade and Commerce, wrote: “As to the testing of the feasibility of making New Carlisle the western terminus of the fast Atlantic service, the government does not see its way clear to grant a subsidy for that purpose.”<sup>27</sup> In May 1898, the ALSR submitted a proposal to Richard Cartwright, minister of Trade and Commerce, for a weekly fast line of steamers of 17 knots between Canada and Great Britain travelling between Paspébiac and Milford Haven, which they indicated would start in August of that year. The company claimed that if awarded the subsidy, they would be able to deliver the mails from the London post office to the Montreal post office in less than seven days, one to

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<sup>23</sup> Orders in Council 1883-13878, 1884-0975, 1884-2222, 1884-2298, 1885-1018, 1886-0833, 1886-1280, 1886-2273, 1887-2562, 1888-1561, and 1888-2694, Privy Council Office fonds, RG2 A-1-a, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

<sup>24</sup> Mackenzie, ““They Lost the Smell,”” 18. The leading study of the Fast Atlantic Service is R.A. Shields, “Canada, Great Britain and the Fast Atlantic Service,” *Bulletin of Canadian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1983): 34–48. See also Edward F. Bush, “The Canadian Fast Line and the North Atlantic,” *Dalhousie Review* 53, no. 3 (1973): 480–500. Accounts contemporary to the period include Orlando Perkins Shannon, “The Short Route to Europe and Canadian Ports,” *Journal of Political Economy* 4, no. 1 (December 1895): 54–63 and George H. Dobson, *Modern Transportation and Atlantic Express Tracks* (Halifax: Herald Printing House, 1899).

<sup>25</sup> Mackenzie ““They Lost the Smell,”” 18.

<sup>26</sup> This amount was consistent with Canadian government estimates as to the required subsidy. Shields, *Fast Atlantic Service*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie Bowell to Armstrong, 2 February 1894, in Canada, Parliament, *Papers in Reference to Atlantic Steamship Line between Canada and Great Britain* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1894), 65. New Carlisle was only a few miles west of Paspébiac.

four days faster than delivery through New York and three to five days sooner than existing services provided by Canadian steamers. At the same time, the company would commence a fortnightly freight service at 14 knots from Paspébiac to Liverpool, stopping at an Irish port.<sup>28</sup> The proposal was promised consideration by the department but went no further.

By November 1898, with renewed interest in the fast steamer service, the original ALSR proposal had been modified. The company’s Canadian agent, Captain Montague Yates, wrote that owing to the impossibility of purchasing 20-knot vessels, they would be unable to meet the requirements of the recent tender call for vessels capable of making 500 miles per day (an average of over 20 knots). However, they offered a service at a slightly lesser speed using vessels yet to be acquired by the company, which would still give a five-and-a-half-day service for mails between Montreal and Great Britain in summer, landing at Paspébiac, and only four and a half days using North Sydney, Halifax, or Saint John in winter. They were prepared to take on the contract for a subsidy of \$1,000,000 per annum.<sup>29</sup> The government’s response, which was not written until April of following year, was simply: “the Government is not at present in a position to entertain such proposition as that made by you.”<sup>30</sup>

### **If Not Faster, Then Perhaps Shorter**

One of the major decisions for the company had been where to locate the North American end of the line for the trans-Atlantic shipping route. On the western side of the Atlantic all Canadian shippers faced problems of climate and geography. The St. Lawrence River, the gateway to the interior of the continent, froze over or was plagued with drift ice in the winter, and even the established shipping lines to Canada had to have an alternate ice-free port. In winter, both Saint John and Halifax were used, as were American ports such as Portland and New York. The terminus decision was to great extent informed by the fact that C.N. Armstrong was in control of the Baie des Chaleurs Railway, a tiny, provincially chartered operation then being painfully and slowly constructed in the Gaspé peninsula of eastern Quebec. At Matapedia, the line connected with the Canadian government-owned Intercolonial Railway running from Halifax to Quebec. In a move that may have recognized

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<sup>28</sup> Montague C. Buck to Richard Cartwright, 21 May 1898, Department of Trade and Commerce fonds, RG20-A-1, volume 1173, file 5894, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> Montague Yates to Richard Cartwright, 1 and 2 November 1898, RG20-A-1, volume 1180, file 6094, LAC.

<sup>30</sup> William G. Parmalee, Deputy Minister, to Yates, 6 April 1899, RG20-A-1, volume 1180, file 6094, LAC.



Map showing location of proposed port and rail connections for the Canadian Steamship Company. Other rail lines in the region are not shown.

the impossibility of winter navigation of the St. Lawrence River, but could have come from nothing more than casual study of a map, the company had selected Paspébiac to be the terminus. Paspébiac was a fishing village of fewer than 500 souls with a large export trade in fish. It did have a fair although unprotected harbour without a major wharf or breakwater. In September 1897, officials of the ALSR announced that the rails required for the final 20 miles of construction to reach Paspébiac had been shipped and the inauguration of the service would take place on 25 October. They also proposed that the very next day a steamer would leave Paspébiac for Port aux Basques linking the Baie des Chaleurs Railway with the recently completed Newfoundland Railway.<sup>31</sup> Neither event took place and by the summer of 1898, the Baie des Chaleurs Railway was still under construction and was slowly approaching, but had not yet reached, the village. Armstrong claimed that by creating a port at Paspébiac, some 150 miles could be shaved off the passage distance between Great Britain and North America. Somehow this, combined with the western location of Milford Haven, was computed to cut two days off the passage

<sup>31</sup> "Baie des Chaleurs Railway," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 18 September 1897, 3.

time.<sup>32</sup> Although the route had the potential for reduced time at sea, Paspébiac was still almost 600 miles by rail from Montreal and required at least two changes of rail lines.

The fast line to Lake Superior ports proposed by the ALSR was, as yet, barely begun. The link with Newfoundland was also part of the larger scheme and, in an early solicitation for ALSR funding, Armstrong had noted that Paspébiac was also only a short distance across the Gulf of St. Lawrence from the western terminus of the newly built Newfoundland Railway. The latter crossed the island, promising speedy connection with St. John’s, capital of the colony, and a short jump across the Atlantic to Irish or English ports.<sup>33</sup> The idea of using rail lines in both Ireland and Newfoundland to link shorter sea routes was one that died hard and was still being promoted in 1913.<sup>34</sup>

What would today be termed the competitive advantage lay in the reports that Paspébiac was an ice-free port and that passage through the Gulf of St. Lawrence would not be hindered by floes that closed Quebec City and Montreal to winter shipping. The dream of an ice-free port for Quebec was one of long standing and had been studied by the Quebec legislature and Canadian Parliament in the 1870s. However, much of the information about ice conditions came from shore observation and conjecture, as few vessels had actually transited the area during winter. There was a great deal of reliance on the testimony of one engineer, Colonel F.C. Farijana (1834–1882), a Russian-trained engineer and self-styled hydrographer, who had spent some time in the Gulf in the 1860s and concluded, on limited observation, that most of the Gulf of St. Lawrence was navigable in all seasons. In May 1874, Farijana presented a report to a House of Commons select committee examining the most direct route to Europe, in which he stated that only three harbours – Halifax, Louisburg, and Paspébiac – were worthy of attention and that of the three, the last was preferred.<sup>35</sup> He served as chief engineer of the Baie des Chaleurs Railway the following year and spent part of that summer surveying

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<sup>32</sup> Publicity concerning the Canadian Steamship Company’s route conveniently ignores the fact that since 1890 the extension of the Intercolonial Railway to Cape Breton added the ports of Sydney and Louisbourg to Halifax as Nova Scotia ports much closer to Great Britain than Paspébiac. Strangely absent from the discussion is any mention of Saint John, New Brunswick as an ice-free port, linked by rail through the United States since 1889.

<sup>33</sup> *Morning Leader* (London), 15 June 1895, 4.

<sup>34</sup> H.C. Thomson, *The Newfoundland Trans-Atlantic Route. Via Green Bay, Bay of Islands, and Gaspé* (Bowles & Son, [1913?]).

<sup>35</sup> Canada, Parliament, *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada: Volume 8, Second Session of the Third Parliament, Session 1875* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, [1875]), No. 58, [https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9\\_08052\\_8\\_8/504](https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9_08052_8_8/504).

the route of the line to extend from Paspébiac to Gaspé.<sup>36</sup> He expressed “perfect confidence in the success of winter navigation, assured that upon the first trial all those difficulties that had been so much spoken of would be found obstructive in a very trifling degree.”<sup>37</sup> His assertions concerning the absence of ice in the Gulf were endorsed in an 1883 volume on the Gaspé region.<sup>38</sup> The reliance on Farijana’s 20-year-old assertions and the lack of any conclusive recent information regarding winter ice conditions in the Gulf would prove fatal to the proposal.

It was not inevitable that Milford Haven would be chosen as the eastern port for the trans-Atlantic service. In 1893, promoters of the Canadian rail line had stated that the steamers from Paspébiac would run from there to Liverpool.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the 1890s, a number of other shipping lines developed connections to Canada and the United States through Bristol, Cardiff, and Swansea. Armstrong and others connected with the venture visited a number of locations in Great Britain during 1897 and 1898 and created excitement in those areas as to the possibility of their communities being named as links in the service. Specifically mentioned were visits to Tralee, Galway, and Belmullet in Ireland, and to Plymouth in southern England.<sup>40</sup> The interest from the Milford Docks Company and the Great Western Railway probably was the deciding factor in the choice of port, although the nature and extent of any possible financial contributions from those entities to the venture is unknown.

With Paspébiac and Milford Haven selected as terminals, the next matter was to find a ship. Only weeks before the service was to begin, the Canadian Steamship Company purchased the SS *Galicia*, recently put on the market by Liverpool’s Pacific Steam Navigation Company. That company had a large fleet serving routes between Great Britain and South America. The *Galicia* was 25 years old, having been launched in 1873. The ship was 3,800 gross register tons and 384 feet in length. It had a two-cylinder, 600 horsepower engine driving a single propeller. When launched, the vessel was

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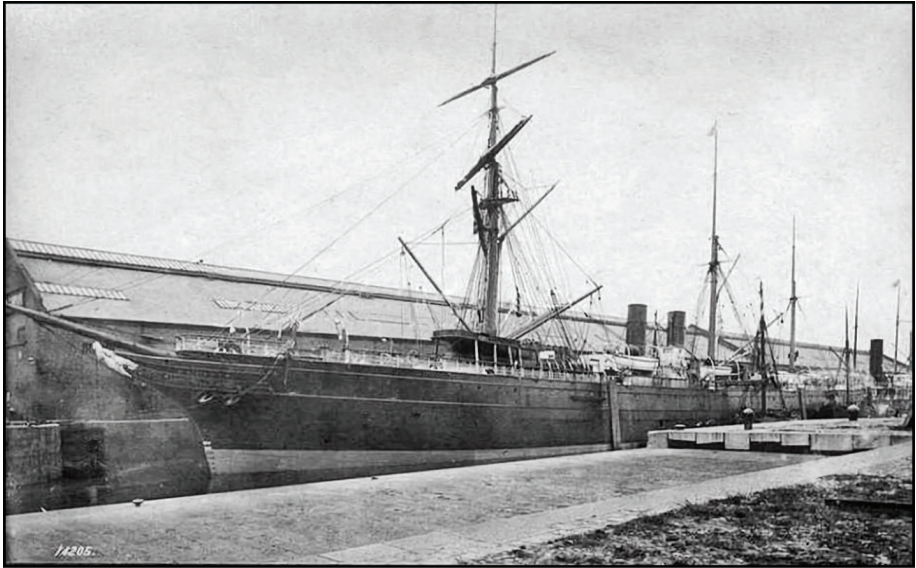
<sup>36</sup> *L’opinion Publique* (Quebec), 22 July 1875, 339.

<sup>37</sup> “Winter Navigation of the St. Lawrence,” *Quebec Daily Mercury*, 22 January 1875, 2.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Langelier, *A Sketch of Gaspesia* (Quebec: Dessault, 1883), 81–84. The idea of breaking the winter ice below Quebec City led to an experimental icebreaker design that was tried, with relatively little success, on the winter steamer route between Prince Edward Island and the Canadian mainland; H.T. Holman “‘A Marine Nondescript’ Canada’s First Icebreaker,” *The Northern Mariner/le marin du nord* 29, no. 4 (winter 2019): 313–34.

<sup>39</sup> “Big Railway Project,” *Toronto Daily Mail*, 22 May 1893, 8.

<sup>40</sup> “Galway and Canada,” *Galway Observer*, 18 September 1897, 2; *Kerry Evening Post*, 26 February 1898, 3; *The Western People* (Mayo), 10 November 1897, 6; *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 28 February 1898, 6.



Pacific Steam Navigation Company steamer *Galicia*, later renamed *Gaspesia*. ([www.clydeships.co.uk](http://www.clydeships.co.uk))

configured with accommodation for 124 first, 42 second, and 500 third (or steerage) class passengers.<sup>41</sup> A long-time fixture on the Liverpool to Valparaiso route, the ship had been placed on the company’s reserve list when displaced by newer vessels.<sup>42</sup> The steamer looked its age, with an old-fashioned design of sailing masts and yards and an impressive bowsprit and figurehead. A first-class vessel when built, the *Galicia* was probably worn out and slow, but the reduced distance of the Atlantic crossing relative to the South American service could mask the fact that it did not have the speed of the more modern ships used by her competitors. The ship certainly fell far short of the specifications in Fast Line proposals and its crossing times were slower than most of the other trans-Atlantic services. The new owners changed the name to the *Gaspesia*.<sup>43</sup> They were sure the vessel would do the job – but it had never sailed in ice.

The reactions to announcements made by the ALSR and Canadian Steamship concerning the establishment of the new trans-Atlantic service were mixed. Hugh A. Allan of the Allan Line and Montreal’s John Torrance, who had both railway and shipping interests, clearly did not rate the Canadian

<sup>41</sup> *Greenock Advertiser*, 19 January 1873, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette and Lloyd’s List*, 14 September 1898, 9; *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 22 November 1898, 5.

<sup>43</sup> “Change of Ship’s Name,” *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 25 November 1898, 4.

Steamship venture highly. Allan told Toronto's *Mail and Empire* the service could have "little commercial or political significance," while Torrence dismissed it as "an unimportant venture."<sup>44</sup> The British monthly magazine *Syren and Shipping Illustrated* doubted the ability of the Chaleur area to generate cargo and questioned its potential for passenger traffic. In the opinion of the journal, the promised lessening of the Atlantic crossing time was offset by the monotony of the six-hour journey from London to Milford Haven, not to mention the time required to travel by rail from Paspébiac to Montreal.<sup>45</sup> Particularly scathing was the position taken by London's *Financial News*. In examining the draft prospectus of a bond issue for the ALSR, the journal had warned investors to steer clear of the company and its operations, citing earlier experiences with the company's financing and the character of C.N. Armstrong. As regards to the proposal to make Paspébiac the terminus, the paper stated, "The Atlantic 'port' of this jumble of lines, partly built, partly building, partly non-existent, would be Paspébiac, a spot of such importance



Paspébiac harbour and wharf ca. 1901. (William Haggerty, photographer. McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal, view 3989)

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<sup>44</sup> "New steamship line considered in Montreal as unimportant venture," *Daily Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 9 December 1898, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Syren and Shipping Illustrated*, cited in *Western Daily Press* (Bristol), 9 December 1898, 3.

it does not appear in many excellent maps of Canada.” This was mirrored by Toronto’s *Monetary Times*’ succinct commentary: “From a port which hardly anybody uses for a port of which very few persons have ever heard.”<sup>46</sup>

In Montreal, the *Canadian Journal of Commerce*, after examining the prospects of the venture especially as regard to the potential of Milford Haven’s hinterland, wrote “The advantages of its magnificent position as a mere harbour are neutralized by the long distance between that port and the great markets of England.”<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Toronto’s *Monetary Times* applauded the stated objective of operating “on business principles and without subsidy” and grudgingly conceded that the new route seemed to be shorter than existing options, noting that “The new route looks very well on the map.”<sup>48</sup> In a dispatch to the Providence, Rhode Island *Journal*, a correspondent gave the opinion that New York and London newspapers had been hoaxed by the profitless proposal and pointed to the financing history of the ALSR.<sup>49</sup> Concern about the ice-free assertions of the promoter seldom appeared, but in the *Miramichi Advance*, published in a community not far from Paspébiac, the ice issue was central to the newspaper’s reservations. They noted that drift ice in the Bay of Chaleur and the Gulf of St. Lawrence would make access to the harbour impossible during the winter months.<sup>50</sup> The *Montreal Daily Witness* mustered the opinions of several former residents of Paspébiac who stated that, in the absence of a major change in the climate, they were unconvinced that the port could be accessed in January and February. The newspaper also interviewed the agent for the Quebec Steamship Company, who stated that Paspébiac seemed to be an unsuitable harbour, lacking deep water and proper shelter.<sup>51</sup> The press also carried a letter from the United States Consul at Gaspé to the US Department of State, that included his observation that while the route would hold an advantage over the St. Lawrence River route for nine months of the year, the harbour at Paspébiac could be not be kept open year-round. His opinion that the port could not be relied on from mid-January to mid-April was included in the published *Consular Reports*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *The Monetary Times, Trade Review and Insurance Chronicle* (Toronto), 16 December 1898, 800.

<sup>47</sup> *Canadian Journal of Commerce* (Montreal), 15 December 1898, 848.

<sup>48</sup> *Financial News* (London), 24 August 1898, cited in *The Monetary Times, Trade Review and Insurance Chronicle*, 9 September 1898, 344.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Byrne, “Proposed steamship lines, little prospect of success for the new venture,” *The Providence Journal*, 22 December 1898, 4.

<sup>50</sup> “An Important Steamship Line,” *Miramichi Advance*, 15 December 1898, 2.

<sup>51</sup> “Paspébiac Harbour,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 9 December 1898, 7.

<sup>52</sup> “U.S. Consul Dickson’s Opinion on the Subject,” *Montreal Herald*, 22 December 1898,

Generally, opinion on the eastern side of the Atlantic was less likely to be critical of the initiative, possibly because less was known of the challenges of geography, management, and climate than by those in North America. The paucity of unfavourable views may attest to the success of Armstrong and Canadian Steamship's public relations efforts. One English magazine noted the overblown coverage that British media accorded the steamship venture, which they described as a small private scheme of a minor Canadian railway. While wishing the project well, they noted "it is only courting disappointment to talk of it as an important factor in developing the relations between this country and the Dominion."<sup>53</sup> In spite of pockets of doubt, Armstrong's publicists appear to have been quite successful in having the British press paint an attractive picture of the initiative, preying on the lack of knowledge of particulars of the Canadian operations. For example, the potential of the trade of the port of Paspébiac was reported to be enhanced by surroundings described as "rich dairy country, exporting great quantities of cheese and butter, also raising oats, peas, and other of the coarse grains," needing only a direct link to markets to avoid the trip to Montreal for shipping.<sup>54</sup> The company continually referred to its fast ships, but the reality was that neither the *Gaspesia* nor any of the other vessels promised or imagined for the route could come close to meeting the times posted by the existing carriers, much less the 20-knot objective for "Fast Ships" that was included in several Canadian government tender calls. Nevertheless, few of the interviews or press releases circulated by the Canadian Steamship Company highlighted this deficiency.

### **The Experiment Begins ...**

In early December 1898, there was excitement on the Milford Haven waterfront with the impending departure of the Canadian Steamship Company's vessel, the SS *Gaspesia*, for Canada. For several months, stories had appeared in journals on both sides of the Atlantic about the new service linking the Pembrokeshire port with North America. The service commenced with great fanfare on 7 December 1898, with officials of the Great Western Railway and government representatives travelling in a special train down from London in a record time of less than six hours.<sup>55</sup> In the town, school children were given

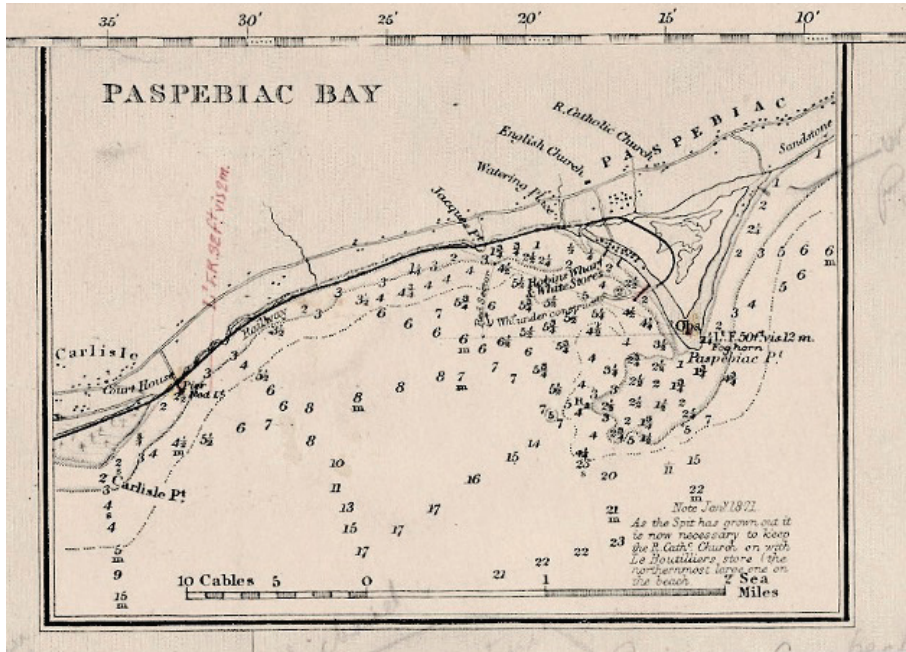
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1. United States, Bureau of Foreign Commerce, "Canadian-British Steamship Company," *Consular Reports. Commerce, Manufactures, Etc.* 59, no. 222 (March 1899): 381.

<sup>53</sup> "A Canadian steamship venture," *The Outlook in Politics, Life, Letters and the Arts* 2, no. 43 (26 November 1898): 520.

<sup>54</sup> "New Atlantic Service," *South Wales Echo* (Cardiff), 8 December 1898, 4.

<sup>55</sup> The *Gaspesia* actually began its voyage several days earlier in Liverpool but its passage to



“Paspébiac Bay,” detail from the Admiralty chart, *Chaleur Bay surveyed by Capt. H.W. Bayfield, R.N., 1839, 11 July 1845 with corrections to September 1908*. Close examination of the chart shows “Wharf under construction” at the end of the rail line but it was never completed. (Admiralty fonds, R11630-825-4-E, box no. 2000358090, item no. 1715 BA 1908, LAC)

the day off to celebrate the new service. On board the *Gaspesia* a banquet was held and the speeches and toasts attested to the belief that the day’s events were only the beginning of an era that would see Milford Haven grow to rival Swansea, Cardiff, and even Liverpool as a trans-Atlantic port.<sup>56</sup>

The ship had a rough and slow passage of 10 days to the Bay of Chaleur, far removed from the speedy six-day passage touted by the promoters. The bulk of the passengers consisted of a party of more than 100 Polish Jews and Austrian Catholics bound for New York.<sup>57</sup> The US Consul at Gaspé, Almar F. Dickson, noted that “they appear to be a very poor class of people,” and suggested that the port might be turned into “a dumping ground for inferior

Milford Haven was delayed by poor weather.

<sup>56</sup> *Evening Express* (Cardiff), 8 December 1898, 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Semi-Weekly Sun* (Saint John), 21 December 1898, 7; *Daily Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 15 December 1898, 7. Some 103 of the 110 passengers held through rail tickets to New York via Montreal.

emigrants.<sup>58</sup> The Canadian port was far from ready for the ship's arrival, with the wharf incomplete and the rails still two miles short of the community.<sup>59</sup> Owing to the wharf being unfit to land passengers and cargo, the steamship company announced it had purchased a steamer tug, the 125-foot *Hiawatha*, as a tender to meet vessels at the harbour for the transfer of passengers and goods.<sup>60</sup> When the vessel did arrive it was moored at New Carlisle, three miles to the west.<sup>61</sup> On 21 December, the *Gaspesia* left Paspébiac on her return via Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The stop at Charlottetown was necessary to secure a subsidy of \$1,000 that was available for direct shipping from Prince Edward Island to British ports.<sup>62</sup> However, before it reached the island capital, the *Gaspesia* fetched up on a reef near the harbour mouth. Although easily gotten off on the next tide without having to be towed, the incident did not bode well for the ship's luck. In addition to being delayed, the ship's arrival port in Great Britain had to be shifted from Milford Haven to Liverpool, as the cargo of over 1,000 sheep and several head of cattle required a slaughterhouse, and the construction of such a facility in Milford Haven was still awaiting approval. Moreover, it was discovered that 99 sheep and one cow had died on the voyage and that the animals had arrived in "a depreciated condition," leading to the captain being fined for failure to meet Board of Agriculture shipping regulations.<sup>63</sup>

At year's end, the reports on the progress of the shore facilities in Paspébiac were glowing. The railway's civil engineer, C.E. Shanley, noted 50 men were at work on an 1,800-foot wharf that would give a depth of 30 feet of water at low tide and berthing space for two vessels. A contract had been let for the corrugated iron grain elevator with a million-bushel capacity. The gap in the rail line was being closed with 600 men scheduled to work on the last

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<sup>58</sup> Almar F. Dickson to David J. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State, 21 December 1898, T467-05-0306-0308; Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Gaspé Basin, 1856-1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789-1909; General records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, MD; <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/212239920?objectPage=306>.

<sup>59</sup> *Toronto World*, 19 November 1898, 1; *Miramichi Advance*, 15 December 1898, 2

<sup>60</sup> *Montreal Herald*, 14 December 1898, 5. It later emerged that the tug had been chartered, not purchased, and the crew had not been paid. The vessel ran ashore and was declared a total loss in June 1899. "Steamer in More Trouble," *Montreal Herald*, 27 July 1899, 2.

<sup>61</sup> "Line of Steamers for the Dominion," *Montreal Herald*, 20 December 1898, 1.

<sup>62</sup> The subsidy was awarded to the Beaver Line but it was unable to provide a ship for an additional December crossing and the Canadian Steamship agent seized the opportunity to write to Islander Louis Henry Davies, minister of Marine and Fisheries, seeking the funds. RG20-A-1, volume 1180, file 6095, LAC.

<sup>63</sup> "Shipment of Cattle," *Daily Examiner* (Charlottetown), 16 March 1899, 2.

few miles and the bridge abutments on the Bonaventure River, west of New Carlisle, were complete and awaiting the superstructure. The plans for the port included filling in the barachois lagoon at Paspébiac for use as a marshalling yard.<sup>64</sup>

### ... And Ends

In anticipation of unusual steamer traffic in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the winter of 1898–1899, Agent J.U. Gregory of the Department of Marine and Fisheries in Quebec had ordered that rather than extinguishing their lights until spring, lighthouse keepers should remain at their posts and keep the lights burning until further notice. As the route of the Canadian Steamship’s vessels was not known, this requirement was placed on almost all of the light stations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.<sup>65</sup> This seems to have been the extent of arrangements made by the Dominion government to accommodate the new service.

On 11 January, the *Gaspesia* departed on her second trip from Milford Haven with cargo and 100 passengers. The following day local press carried reports that the steamship line had acquired two additional ships from the North German Lloyd Line so that a weekly schedule could be maintained. The *Gaspesia* sailed through the Gulf of St. Lawrence to unload and take on cargo at Paspébiac with little difficulty. The vessel then headed for Newfoundland, where St. John’s had been substituted for iced-in Charlottetown as a port of call.

Buoyed by what appeared to be a successful voyage, the company chose this time to announce a major stock issue for public subscription, with £200,000 in five per cent debentures and £100,000 in six per cent preference stock on offer. The principal and interest were guaranteed by the ALSR. In addition, the company undertook to provide half a dozen steamers to travel between Paspébiac and Milford Haven or Liverpool.<sup>66</sup> The timing could hardly have been worse.

Inexperience, wilful denial of ice reports, or poor planning saw the vessel try to go to the south of the Magdalen Islands and not around the north of the

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<sup>64</sup> “Work at Paspébiac. Construction of Wharf and Approaches Proceeding Rapidly,” *Montreal Gazette*, 31 December 1898, 5; “A New Grain Elevator,” *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 25 January 1899, 6.

<sup>65</sup> “Les gardiens des phares reçoivent ordre de rester à leurs postes,” *La Patrie*, 26 November 1898, 5.

<sup>66</sup> “New steamship company. Issue of stock for Milford–Paspébiac service,” *Daily Mail and Empire*, 20 January 1899, 3.

archipelago.<sup>67</sup> By 3 February, the *Gaspesia* was stuck fast in the drift ice that threatened to carry her into the shallows surrounding the islands. Although the steamer occasionally found open water, there were no leads running out of the ice pack. On 25 February, the rudder head was damaged and the *Gaspesia* was completely at the mercy of the drifting ice. Although not far from the islands, there was no way the ice-bound steamer could be assisted. At one point, some fishermen from the Magdalens were able to make their way across the ice to visit the ship and bring much-appreciated tea and sugar. While there were only three passengers aboard, there was a crew of more than 70 and provisions were soon in short supply. An early message from the ship stated that it had ample coal and supplies for 30 days and, luckily, had a consignment of poultry in the cargo that could supplement the provisions. However, the 30 days soon passed with no change in the ice conditions. Before the ordeal ended, the *Gaspesia* was locked in the ice for over nine weeks, not getting free until 11 April, and then only with the assistance of a Newfoundland sealing steamer that had been sent to its aid. With damaged hull plates, an inoperable rudder, and six feet of water in the fore hold, the steamer crept slowly to St. John's, Newfoundland.

The delay brought the company's promises to provide additional steamers to the forefront. Even before the *Gaspesia* was located and freed from the ice field, the company was spinning a new tale. Another steamer, the *Metapedia* (formerly the *Halsberg* of the Norddeutscher Lloyd line) would continue the service, sailing for Paspébiac in March.<sup>68</sup> This only added to the confusion of multiple vessels, named and unnamed, by which the company proposed to continue operations. It had long been asserted that the *Gaspesia* was to be only the first in a fleet of vessels that would serve on the route. Some of the earliest accounts noted a vessel called the *Paspébiac* but this never existed and may have been the proposed new name of another vessel under consideration. Early in 1899, it was announced that two steamers of the Norddeutscher Lloyd line, the *Werra* and the *Fudla*, had been purchased for the Canadian line. These were iron sister ships built in Glasgow in 1882 and were of over 5,000 tons displacement.<sup>69</sup> However, in what was described as a "singular accident" at the Birkenhead drydock, the keel blocks under the *Fudla* gave way causing

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<sup>67</sup> Ironically the winter of 1898–1899 was comparatively warm and the waters around Prince Edward Island were open for much of the season. Teresa Devor, "The Explanatory Power of Climate History for the 19th Century Maritimes and Newfoundland: A Prospectus," *Acadiensis* 43, no.2 (Summer/Autumn 2014): 69.

<sup>68</sup> "Increase their Service: The Ill-luck of the 'Gaspesia' Stimulates the Owners," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 16 April 1899, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Cardiff Times*, 11 February 1899, 2.

irreparable damage to the hull that led to scrapping the ship.<sup>70</sup> The sale of the vessels to Canadian Steamship was never completed and was, in all probability, only a proposed charter arrangement.

Following the accident with the *Fudla*, Canadian Steamship hastily concluded a charter with Elder Demster and Company for the *Lake Ontario*, which Elder Demster acquired when they took over the assets of the formerly Canadian-owned Beaver Line (Canada Shipping Company Ltd.) late in 1898. Although it was reported that the *Lake Ontario* would sail from Milford Haven, it appears that it left for St. John's directly from Liverpool late in February 1899.<sup>71</sup> On its arrival in Newfoundland, Canadian Steamship ordered the captain to proceed to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to locate and assist the *Gaspesia*. He, however, refused to risk the chartered vessel for such a dangerous enterprise and decided instead to proceed to a Nova Scotia port.<sup>72</sup>

Even after reaching St. John's in early April, the *Gaspesia's* problems were far from over. The vessel was arrested in an Admiralty Court dispute on the value of the claim by the Baring company's sealing vessel, *Kite*, that had eventually got the ship out of the ice and had assisted it to St. John's. After two months lying in the Newfoundland port, the steamer was sold at auction and then re-acquired by Canadian Steamship.<sup>73</sup> The *Gaspesia* seems never to have gone back on the Milford Haven–Paspébiac route. In September 1899, after leaving St. John's en route back to Great Britain, it was damaged in a storm off Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. The vessel was once again repaired and later carried a cargo of timber deals from New Brunswick back across the Atlantic to Glasgow, where the ship was taken out of service.<sup>74</sup> Its age, the ice and storm damage, and the fact that the winter route was clearly a failure, combined to bring the vessel's life to an end. Following an 1899 return to Liverpool, the *Gaspesia* was again sold and later that year sailed to Genoa, Italy with a cargo of coal, but not before going aground in the Liverpool approach channel.<sup>75</sup> Upon arrival in the Italian port, the ship was broken up.

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<sup>70</sup> *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 3 February 1899, 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 February 1899, 5. “Departure of the Lake Ontario,” *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 23 February 1899, 5.

<sup>72</sup> “Two Months Icebound,” *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 23 March 1899, 5.

<sup>73</sup> “Sale of the Gaspesia,” *South Wales Daily News* (Cardiff), 5 August 1899, 6. The cargo and cabin furniture as well as linens and dishes were also auctioned to help meet the ships debts; *Evening Telegram* (St. John's), 23 August 1899, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette and Lloyd's List*, 5 September 1899, 11; *Scotsman*, 13 October 1899, 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette and Lloyd's List*, 14 October 1899, 8; *Liverpool Shipping Telegraph and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 22 November 1899, 5.

The *Gaspesia's* ice delay also caused problems back in Milford Haven. Although it was reported that the SS *Werra* would be put on the route, that does not seem to have happened and the arrangement for use of the vessel was never completed. In February, some 50 German, Russian, and Polish Jews, emigrants who were in Milford Haven awaiting passage on the *Gaspesia*, became frustrated with the delays and the inadequacy of their shore accommodation and rioted, threatening to strangle the local officer of the company. A strong cordon of police was necessary to guard the port office to prevent further incidents.<sup>76</sup> The emigrants subsequently embarked from Liverpool on an Allan Line vessel.

### **The End of the Line**

The Canadian Steamship Company failed to prosper, although as late as March 1899 it was still advertising its winter sailing route ("Short Line to Great Britain") between Milford Haven, Paspébiac, and St. John's. However, the vessel noted in the advertisement was the chartered SS *Lake Ontario*, sailing between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and London.<sup>77</sup> In an interview, Captain Montague Yates, the Canadian manager of the steamship company, told the press that the storm of criticism surrounding the imprisonment of the *Gaspesia* had been unfair and the incident was "rather unfortunate," the ship being not suited for service in the Gulf, and asserted that "two fine new steamers" would be on the route the next year.<sup>78</sup> The fine new steamers never appeared and the last steamer on the route between Paspébiac and Milford Haven was the 3,000-ton SS *Dorset*. In March of 1899 it had been chartered from the firm Macbeth and Gray of Liverpool by the Canadian Steamship Company to run from Swansea to Paspébiac, stopping at Milford Haven. The Swansea press noted that this was a triumph for Swansea shippers and assumed it would develop in time as a route "without the interposition of Milford."<sup>79</sup> After reaching Canada, the vessel had loaded a full return cargo, but at Campbellton and not at Paspébiac, where the rail line was closed after a bridge had been swept away.<sup>80</sup> The vessel was scheduled to arrive in Swansea by the end of May 1899.<sup>81</sup> Armstrong tried to maintain a good face by declaring that the

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<sup>76</sup> "A Sequel to the *Gaspesia's* Delay," *South Wales Echo*, 17 February 1899, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Toronto World*, 17 March 1899, 5.

<sup>78</sup> "Not a Fair Trial," *Halifax Chronicle*, 10 March 1899, republished in the *Morning Guardian* (Charlottetown), 13 March 1899, 1.

<sup>79</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 13 March 1899, 4.

<sup>80</sup> *St. John Daily Sun*, 5 May 1899, 5.

<sup>81</sup> "Wales and Canada," *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 24 May 1899, 3;

service would resume in the fall with greatly improved port facilities at Paspébiac and hinting at government contribution to the project, but in reality the Canadian Steamship Company was barely heard from again after the sale of its only ship.<sup>82</sup> By the end of August, the *Montreal Herald* painted a grim picture for those to whom Canadian Steamship was indebted as claims against the company mounted.<sup>83</sup> Creditors brought a bankruptcy action in the British courts,<sup>84</sup> but after protracted negotiations the majority of them accepted the issuance of shares in the ALSR.<sup>85</sup> That was not to be a happy arrangement, as shortly afterwards that railway encountered further financial difficulties and was absorbed by another company.

Meanwhile, activities had ground to a halt in Paspébiac. The Baie des Chaleurs section of the ALSR had still not reached Paspébiac by July of 1900, when the line was taken over for the benefit of bondholders.<sup>86</sup> It appears that almost all of the promised port improvements, including the wharf and the million-bushel grain elevator, were never even begun.

The Gaspé rail line was rarely profitable, even when it was eventually extended to the town of Gaspé near the tip of the peninsula. Milford Haven never developed as a trans-Atlantic liner port and Paspébiac returned to its sleepy existence as a Gaspé fishing village. The dream of winter steamers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence was haunted by the *Gaspesia's* nine weeks in the ice, and even with the development of powerful dedicated icebreakers to assist with late season access to Quebec and Montreal, marine transportation in the Gulf in winter remains problematic. Effective linkage of marine and rail services across the Atlantic would not take place until the Canadian Pacific Railway began its steamship services after 1900. The Gaspé port's brief flirtation as a port of call on the Atlantic ferry trade was over and there were very few obituaries. One of the exceptions was the *Canadian Journal of Commerce* that noted that although the *Gaspesia* may have been unsuitable for the experiment, the problems could not be blamed on the vessel as it was of the “ordinary class of tramp vessels that is at all likely to venture to trade in the St. Lawrence in winter time.”<sup>87</sup> Dealing with the wind-driven pack ice would require a number

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“Swansea and the Canadian Line,” *Herald of Wales*, 27 May 1899, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Evening Telegram* (St. John's), 26 June 1899, 4.

<sup>83</sup> “Have Small Hope: Creditors of the Canadian Steamship Company will Lose,” *Montreal Herald*, 31 August 1899, 1.

<sup>84</sup> *London Gazette*, 21 November 1899, 7362.

<sup>85</sup> *Lloyd's List*, 29 November 1900, 10.

<sup>86</sup> *St. John Daily Sun*, 14 July 1900, 4, quoting from a recent edition of the *Montreal Gazette, Railway and Shipping World*, August 1900, 237.

<sup>87</sup> “Winter Navigation of the St. Lawrence,” *Canadian Journal of Commerce, Finance and*

of modern and powerful icebreakers. It would be decades before these were developed.

Even if Montague Yates's claim of unfair criticism of the venture was correct, the failure of the Canadian Steamship Company rested in a series of decisions made by the company itself. It was the wrong ship, the wrong port, and the wrong season to try and develop a completely new approach to the existing structure of trans-Atlantic steamer traffic. Moreover, the company was only a link, and perhaps the weakest one, in a long, complex, and undeveloped transportation system. The experience with the Canadian Steamship Company may well have served as a cautionary tale warning off other would-be promoters of Canada's trans-Atlantic steamer services.

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