

## Militia Records

The origins of the Militia in Gaspé go back to 1777. That is the year that Nicholas Cox, the first Lt. Governor for the District of Gaspé finally arrived. Governor Carleton had appointed him in 1775, but the threat of an American invasion of Quebec had necessitated him staying in Quebec to help organize the defense of the province. Among his duties on arriving in Gaspé in the summer of 1777 was taking a census of the district and establishing a militia.

Generally the records of the militia for Quebec/Lower Canada can be found in the National Archives in RG 9, 1A1. For the most part this collection consists of correspondence between the Adjutant General's office and local commandants of the militia. The correspondence is sorted by in letters and out letters, then by year and then by district. The correspondence from Gaspé makes for interesting reading, but unfortunately the records do not start until after John Paterson's death.

We are, however, able to determine a few things about the militia in Gaspé for this period from the correspondence of Governor Frederick Haldimand. Local Gaspé magistrate and merchant Felix O'Hara corresponded quite extensively with Gov. Haldimand. Much of this correspondence is addressed to or received from Capt. Felix O'Hara. It is not surprising that O'Hara as the leading citizen and largest landowner of the area should be commissioned as captain of the militia for the area. There is also a correspondence from (Peter?) Fraser, captain of the militia for Perce. One letter from Perce was also signed by the lieutenant and the ensign of the militia in Perce. If the militia company in Perce had a captain, lieutenant and ensign, it is reasonable to expect that the militia company in Gaspé also had a captain, lieutenant and ensign. If O'Hara was Justice of the Peace, John Paterson Bailiff and Richard Ascah sub-Bailiff, and O'Hara was Captain of the militia, it would not be surprising to learn that John Paterson was lieutenant and Richard Ascah ensign.

Speculation that John Paterson was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Gaspé Militia originates from claims that John was a lieutenant in Wolfe's army. We know for certain that if he served in the British army he was not a commissioned officer and was likely a non-commissioned officer. If he was not a lieutenant in the army where did this tradition come from? From being a lieutenant in the militia. One of the earliest printed statements claiming John was a lieutenant can be found in *Historical Gaspé*<sup>1</sup> under the heading "The population of Gaspé – Disbanded Soldiers and Loyalists" where it states:

In the spring of 1764, Governor Murray allowed Felix O'Hara, a naval lieutenant, to settle wherever he wished in Gaspé, provided he did not take anyone else's place. On June the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same year, Hugh Montgomery asked for a grant of land on the north shore of Gaspé Basin. At the same time John Patterson, a lieutenant in Wolfe's army, settled on the upper York River.

Roy and Brault in *Historical Gaspé* provide no evidence for their claim. Lucien Brault held a B.A, M.A. and Ph. D. in history from the University of Ottawa. He was Assistant Director and then Director of Research and the Public Archives of Canada while also teaching history at the University of Ottawa. What information would lead him to conclude that John was a lieutenant?

One possibility is that he found a Lt. John Paterson in the muster rolls of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, but this John settled elsewhere (see section on Military Records for more details).

Was Lucien Brault aware of some records that are in the National Archives that refer to John as a lieutenant that we have yet to uncover?

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<sup>i</sup> Roy, Charles-Eugène & Lucien Brault; *Historical Gaspé*, Au Moulin des Lettres Quebec, 1934 p. 116.