

ART. XI.—DESCRIPTIVE SKETCH OF * ST. PAUL'S ISLAND, AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE.

BY MR. ADAMS.

READ 5TH FEBRUARY, 1831.

I beg leave to present to the Literary and Historical Society some brief notices on the subject of St. Paul's Island, which I had occasion to visit last summer in my professional capacity as Architect, for the purpose of ascertaining the most eligible site for a Light-House, to be there erected, at the joint expence of Lower Canada and New Brunswick. The party appointed were supplied with every document relating to the Island which could be obtained, particularly with one of much value to them drawn up by Mr. Jones, of the Royal Navy. They sailed from Quebec in the month of June, 1830, in the hired Government Brig Kingfisher, and having touched at Miramichi, they afterwards proceeded direct to St. Paul's Island, and disembarking there on the 14th of July, commenced their investigations on the same day.

The Island of St. Paul is a mass of Granite rock, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and one mile broad; it is situated between Newfoundland and the Northern extremity of Cape Breton, directly in the route of ships sailing to and from the gulf of

* The Latitude and Longitude of St. Paul's Island, as taken by the Officers of H. M. S. Hussar, are as follows :—

Lat. 47° , $12'$, $33''$, N.
 Long. 60° , $11'$, $24''$, W.
 Varn. 23° , $45'$, $00''$, W.



SKETCH
of
ST. PAUL'S ISLAND
by
John Adams
L.S.



THE END

CLARENCE BROWN

1880

St. Lawrence. On all sides it is surrounded by cliffs nearly perpendicular, with deep water to their very bases; so that vessels, unaware of their dangerous proximity, during the dense fogs peculiar to that part of the ocean, may run against these cliffs, in most places, without previously striking upon sunken rocks, or grounding; and thus be dashed at once into fragments. And it is but too well ascertained that many such disasters have there taken place, attended with melancholy loss of human lives. For, in such casualties, small is the chance of escape;—even should the unfortunate mariners be enabled by some means to scale the cliff and attain the summit, yet, during six months in the year, their escape would probably only be from one mode of dying to another yet more appalling and miserable,—to perish by cold and hunger. On one part of the Island, very near the site of our encampment, lie the remains of seventeen persons huddled together in one grave, who sailed in a vessel from Miramichi some years ago late in the fall, and, after effecting a landing, there perished. This unfortunate event was first made known by the circumstance of a number of watches being offered for sale at Halifax, by a person known to be a wrecker; on the paper of one of which was written a kind of diary by its owner, a young merchant from Miramichi, mentioning the name of the vessel, the date of its wreck, the impossibility of lighting a fire, the number who had already died, and the dreadful death staring the then surviving remnant in their faces. In consequence a vessel was immediately despatched to the Island, where the bodies were all found heaped together, and they were there buried. I did not visit the spot, as it appeared to be very difficult of access, but saw from our boats the remains of two or three upright

poles or oars in a kind of hollow, which we conjectured had been put up with an intention of making some sort of shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

Another vessel, a Transport, having on board a number of troops, I think about the year 1813, struck against the cliffs on the Atlantic side of the Island and immediately parted; the deck remaining for a time almost entire, while the hull and all below sank into deep water. Those who were on deck, it is related, were mostly saved by means of the bow-sprit which projected over a kind of ledge and enabled them to gain a place of safety. Those who had been below were all drowned.

This distressing calamity, it is said, occurred on a Saturday evening, and the gentlemen in the cabin were just preparing to spend a convivial night, rejoicing in the approaching termination of a tedious sea passage, when the ship struck. Captain Rayside, of the Kingfisher, while coasting the Island in his boat, found the remains of what seemed to have been a bow-sprit, a soldier's broken canteen, and part of the number of a transport's boat, of which the figures 8.0 were distinguishable. These two accidents I have detailed as having, in some measure, come under my own observation from the remains noticed. It is satisfactory to be able to add that all those who had effected an escape from the transport to the rock were afterwards taken off and saved.

The interior of St. Paul's Island is divided into two distinct parallel ranges of hills, which run through nearly its whole length from S. W. to N. E.—Of these ranges that on the eastern or Atlantic side is the highest and is divided into three distinct eminences, sloping down with steep declivity to the water's edge, the centre one of which is

somewhat higher than the other two, and is the spot unanimously selected by the party as the most eligible site for a light-house, should only one be built on the Island.

The elevation above the sea of this highest land is four hundred and forty-three feet, which was determined by a series of levels observed with a good instrument.

There are several small runs of water in the Island, the largest of which is about six feet wide, and flows between the parallel ranges of hills just mentioned; and after passing through two small lakes situated at an elevation of perhaps 300 feet above the level of the sea, falls abruptly into the southern cove of Trinity Bay, so named by our party.

The water is yellowish,—as is that in every part of the Island,—but, I have reason to believe, not unwholesome; and it would afford an inexhaustible supply to shipwrecked persons who might discover it.

The greater part of the Island is covered with a growth of stunted trees, principally of the fir kind, but we saw not one, of which we could make even a flag-staff. On some parts these firs grow in a very singular manner, particularly the balsam or *sapin*. I examined one, which, with a stem at least ten inches thick, rose not more than four feet in height; but was spread over the ground like a great mushroom, occupying a circular space of at least 15 feet diameter. In fact on one occasion, as a short cut, we actually scrambled over the tops of these trees, which I suppose could not be less than of thirty years growth,—but here the soil was unusually scanty. Other parts of the Island are bare of trees, particularly much of the western or gulf side, this is owing to a total absence of soil. Near the centre there are two large naturally clear places, on one of which grows nothing but thick deep moss, while the

other, close by, produces a luxuriant growth of a curious kind of bog grass, intermixed with abundance of that singular marshy plant,* whose leaves somewhat resemble a champagne wine glass, and which are generally filled with pure water.—This plant is, I believe, vulgarly called “Lunettes au Cochon” by the Canadian. In this last field or clearing, our usual path led us close beside the edge of a small puddle, as it seemed, of very dark water, the surface of which was not twenty feet square; on the day when our line of levels was performed, one of the party, in order to try the depth of the water, plunged down a levelling rod 22 feet in length, and to his great surprize, found no bottom. In our after trips we took especial care to keep farther from this place, as the soil around, on which we walked, from its shaking, evidently consisted of merely a mat-work of roots and fibres resting on water, through which a hole might easily have been broken by some unlucky footstep.

St. Paul's Island appears to be totally destitute of game of any kind,—for the party did not see one four footed animal during their stay there, which was eight days.—Birds, also, excepting sea fowl, are very rare in this most desolate place. We found only a few crows, some little chirping birds of the linnet kind, and one day a very small owl which we disturbed on his roost, and so alarmed by our unexpected approach that he could scarcely find his wings. But in compensation for this scarcity, the ocean around swarms with delicate fish. Induced by this abundance, a person from Nova Scotia had established here, for the first time, a fishery, and we found him in one of the landing

* *Sarracenia Purpurea*.

places or coves of the Island busily employed. He had nine boats with crews of two men to each, and appeared to be well satisfied with his success; his boats often made three trips a day and returned filled with Cod-fish and Halibut. Besides these there are Mackarel and Herring, which latter they take in nets and use as bait for the Cod. Sometimes, however, these nets were visited by very troublesome customers, for we saw two small sharks about six feet long lying dead on the beach, which had contrived to get entangled, and had almost broken the nets to pieces before they could be got safe on shore. A peculiar species of armed fish which they denominated a Cat-fish, was also very annoying to the fishermen.—I saw one which they had taken, about three feet in length, and its appearance is actually disgusting from ugliness. It had a broad back fin which extended from the shoulders to the tail;—its head somewhat fancifully resembled that of a cat, the mouth was like a bull-frog's, and so entirely filled even to the throat with three rows of strong, short, thick and powerful teeth, that I really think I would rather have accepted a cool bite from either of the sharks we there saw, and whose teeth I examined, than from the uninviting jaws of this lesser umpire of the deep.

As before observed, there are only three coves or indentations round the Island, which can be called landing places; and in none of these can even a boat lie safe in all winds.—Two of these coves are on the gulf side of St. Paul's, and near its south-western extremity, and, into each of these, falls a slender stream of good water.—The third is on the Atlantic or eastern side, but has no shelter whatever from even light easterly gales. All these coves have beaches of fine shingle, and are backed by the steep cliffs which

encompass the Island, but which in each of these places are, with some difficulty, accessible, so that it might even be practicable to convey up light stores out of reach of the water. Besides these three points of access, there may be said to be no other for useful purposes. We minutely examined every cranny round the Island in the ship's launch, and occasionally clambered on the rocks at the bases of the cliffs, but found no shelter. In all these bays and indentations, which are very numerous on the western side, we found remains of former wrecks piled up there high and dry,—deals, staves, pieces of bulwarks, planks of boats, &c. &c. plainly indicative of past misfortunes.

Fogs appear to prevail very frequently, and must be regarded as the greatest natural obstacle opposed to the usefulness of a Light-house in this quarter. Respecting the most usual position and influence of these fogs, as to their density at different elevations, there was some discrepancy of opinion among the members of our party: some of them considering that the lower parts of the Island and of the neighbouring coasts were more frequently and generally visible during such phænomena than the higher regions. From the observations I was enabled to make there and elsewhere, I am inclined to differ from that conclusion, and believe that a strong light at the elevation of 90 or 100 feet above the highest ground, would in most cases, be above the fog altogether, and prove more effectual than one placed lower down. On two occasions, those in the ship, which lay off and on St. Paul's while we remained on shore, assured me that the whole contour of the hill tops was distinctly to be traced in a kind of misty line, while all below was totally enveloped in thick obscureness; and one day whilst on the summit of the highest hill I could plainly

see the neighbouring heights, while the lower parts were invisible; this convinces me that on many occasions the veil of fog is very thin, which clings to these highest parts, while it becomes denser and denser, and spreads out more widely around the land as it approximates to the level of the sea; and I conceive also that these fogs are generally more intense immediately near such Islands as St. Paul's than at a few miles distance. So that a vessel sailing at such distance will often be surrounded by an atmosphere comparatively clear, and be thus enabled to distinguish a light placed on high land in many cases even from the deck. Referring to an instance that may be familiar to many residents at Quebec, I think I may venture to assert that the tops of the Beauport hills are much more frequently visible during summer fogs, than the lower parts of them; and this same appearance I had several times the opportunity of noticing in different parts of the River St. Lawrence: the shores of which, in hazy weather, generally became first visible along their line of summit, while the lower regions still remained enveloped in a dense horizontal mist and quite invisible from the deck of the ship.

All around St. Paul's Island, it may be remarked, that at about three-fourths of a mile distance, the soundings average twenty-five fathoms, gradually shoaling into five; and that, off Trinity Bay, at the southern extremity of the Island, there is a good anchorage at two cables length from the shore in ten fathoms of water, while the wind is from south, and southerly, to north-east.

The granite of which the Island is composed assumes a great variety of appearance, from unequal distributions of the same component minerals; and I am in possession of a few specimens, all broken from the solid cliffs within a

space of twenty yards, which completely illustrate this remark. There is one remarkable appearance of reddish feld spar near the northern end of the Island, which is visible for many miles while approaching from the gulf of St. Lawrence: it consists of three or four bars or strata embedded in the face of the perpendicular cliff, and lying nearly horizontally. These strata are about six feet in depth, and the longest is probably about one hundred yards in extent, and their bright appearance forms a remarkable contrast with the dark face of the main rock whose substance they intersect.

Such are the few remarks which I have ventured to submit to the notice of the Society.—That they are of little consequence I am well aware, unless the circumstance that a considerable sum is likely to be there expended, may invest them with some slight claim to attention.

JOHN ADAMS.

8th January, 1831.