

COMMODORE GEORGE WALKER AT ALSTON POINT, NEPISQUIT

1768-1777



by Patricia Allen

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at
Alston Point, Nepisiguit

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Culture and Sport Secretariat

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Abstract

Commodore George Walker was one of the most successful and publicly acclaimed British privateer sea Captains of the mid-18th century. His exploits during war and peace ranged from the Mediterranean to the North Sea to the coasts of North America. In 1763, following the resolution of some unfortunate personal circumstances in London, George Walker sailed for Nova Scotia. His ship laden with salt and fishing implements, Walker was determined to start a new life in the trade and fishing industries.

By 1768 Walker is successful in establishing a fishing station and trading post at Alston Point, Nepisiguit. With the backing of a British merchant, Hugh Baillie, Walker brings in men and supplies to furnish a comfortable and well-outfitted post. His trade encompasses the entire Bay of Chaleur. He is the only administrator of Justice from Restigouche to Cumberland and the first British subject to set up a land based trading and fishing post on that coast.

Between 1768 and 1775 the Alston Point establishment flourishes. By 1775 over 10,000L of trade goods have been received from London. Walker's company is shipping a variety of salt fish to the Mediterranean, London and the West Indies. During the winter months Walker's carpenters and crew occupy themselves in building ships that range between 30 to 300 tons. Walker also manages to win the respect of the Acadians, the Natives and the few other British who inhabit the Bay.

By 1777 war with the revolting American colonies has put fear into all the Nova Scotia outpost settlements. Privateer raiders are indiscriminately attacking and plundering any coastal establishments in British territory. While the Governor at Halifax is busy reissuing Commissions to and testing the loyalty of all the *gentlemen* within his territory, Walker sails for London. He is well acquainted with the tactics of the American privateers and only too familiar with how their actions could be stopped. On September 20th, 1777, as he lodges in London, Walker dies. In July of 1778, American privateers plunder all the British establishments in Chaleur Bay, including no doubt, the homes and stores of George Walker.

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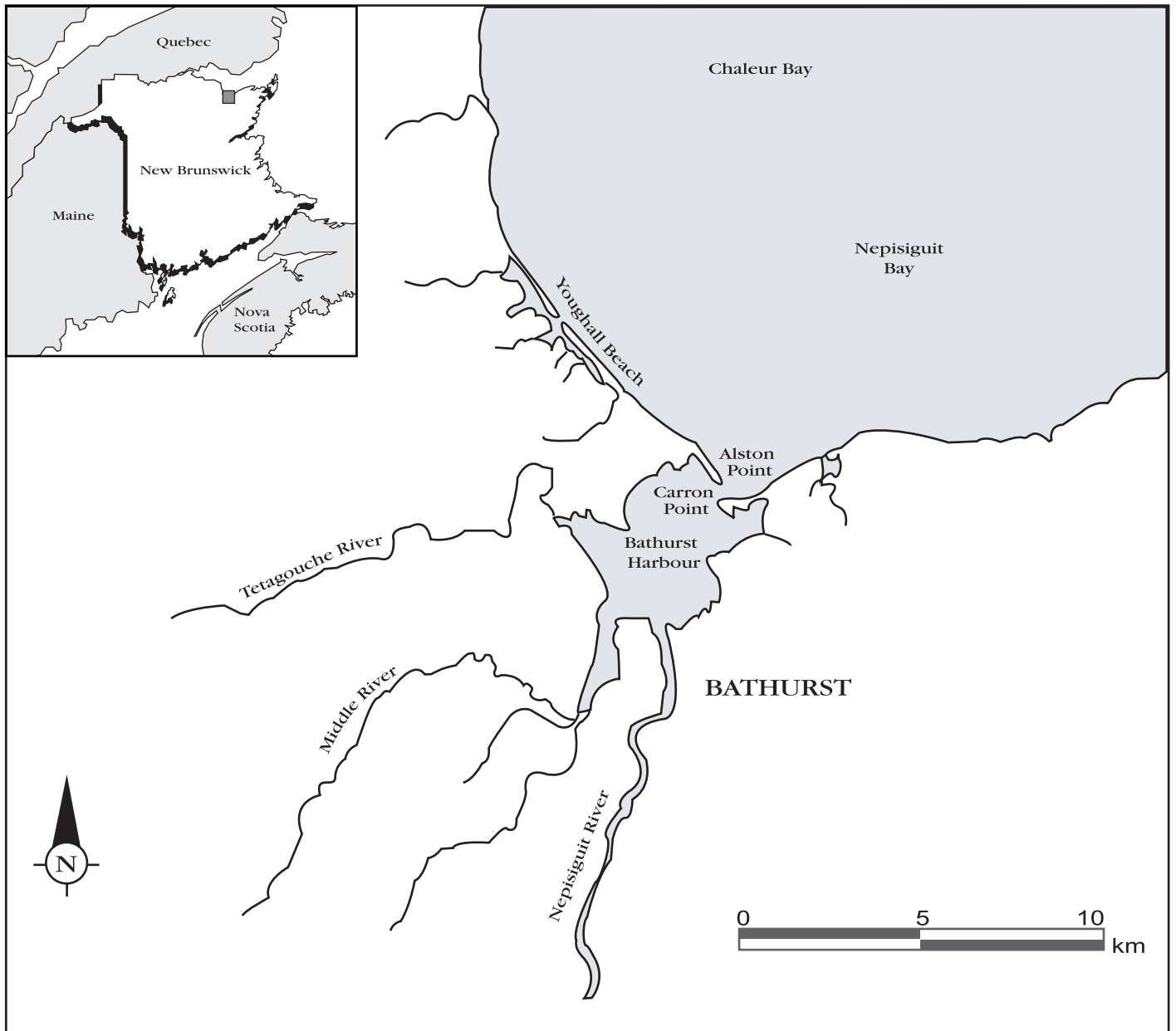


Figure1: Map of Bathurst Harbour, northern New Brunswick

Introduction

“At Alston Point Mr. Walker had a splendid and elegantly furnished summer residence, also five large stores, a requisite number of out houses and a tolerably strong battery. Here he also had a very fine lawn and a handsomely disposed garden. At Youghall near the head of the harbor he had another large dwelling house which he occupied in winter; besides a fishing establishment on the Big River about three miles from its entrance. At this time Mr. Walker engrossed the whole trade of the Bay then consisting of an extensive exploitation of furs, moose skins, and the hides, fat and tusks of the walrus. To these general exports he usually added an annual cargo of salmon, and sometimes two or three of cod and scale fish to the West Indies and the Mediterranean.”¹

To describe George Walker’s Nepisiguit establishment, Robert Cooney had had the opportunity to gather a first hand account from someone who had actually worked at Walker’s post. Mr. James Robertson of Bathurst, originally from Banffshire, Scotland, was well over 90 years of age at the time of

Cooney’s 1832 publication. Immigrating to Nova Scotia circa. 1764, Robertson was employed for several years as Master Cooper in the service of the celebrated Commodore George Walker. Robertson’s 1834 obituary claims that even at the advanced age of 98, *“his memory, till within a few days of his death, remained unimpaired and he was a faithful and interesting chronicle of events occurring at the period ...”*²

But who was this celebrated Commodore Walker and why do we find him *engrossed in the whole trade of Chaleur Bay* during the late 1760s? To learn something of Walker’s earlier life we must turn to *The Voyages and Cruises of Commodore Walker During the Late Spanish and French Wars*.³ This rare book printed in Dublin in 1762 details the exploits of a gallant and heroic 18th Century sea Captain. A reprint of the same volume, updated with an *Introduction and Notes* by H. S. Vaughn, was published by the Seafarers’ Library in London in 1928.⁴ A brief summary of important events from the original book is printed in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.⁵ Additional biographical information concerning Walker beyond 1762 is included in the *Encyclopedia Canadiana*.⁶

¹ Robert Cooney 1832, pp.171-172.

² The Chatham Gleaner, Obituary, 1834.

³ Manwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises ...* 1928.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Loughton 1909, pp.513-515.

⁶ MacBeath 1977, p. 252.

George Walker - Mariner

George Walker, originally from Scotland, joined the Dutch Navy at a young age. His introduction to life at sea came at the hands of ship's Masters who were entrusted with protecting trade vessels against Turkish and Greek pirates in the Mediterranean. A young Walker learned the lessons of seamanship and the tactics of battle while at the same time gaining the understanding that capturing prizes and conducting trade could make profits.⁷

By 1740 George Walker was principal owner and commander of the *William*, a private merchant vessel. To better protect his own trading interests between London and South Carolina during the outbreak of war with Spain, Walker applied to the High Court seeking a Letter of Marque.

*“ Nov.20, 1740. Appeared personally Capt. George Walker & produced a Warrant from the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for the granting of a Commission or Letter of Marque to him the said George Walker & in pursuance of H. M. Instructions to Privateers made the following declaration, that his ship is called the William & is of the burthen of about 200 tons, that he the Declarant goeth Commander of her, that she carries 20 guns, 30 men, 36 small arms, 36 cutlases...”*⁸

In 1740 the coast of the Carolinas was infested with Spanish privateers.⁹ When Walker arrived in American waters, he found the settlements on the North Carolina coast completely defenseless. In the absence of any English man-of-war, Walker put the *William* and her crew at the service of the colonial government. A record of billing for Walker's service states that the Province of North Carolina paid a total of £10,000 for the *“Hireing and fitting out with the Victuals and Men the ship William of London, Captain George Walker, Commander from Cape Fear to Ocacock Inlet, for the relief of the inhabitants of these parts from some Spanish privateers that lay there taking all ships coming in and out of the inlet, destroying cattle ashore and devastating the country”*.¹⁰

From all accounts Walker was quite successful in clearing the Carolina coasts of the Spanish. The Governor of the colony and his Assembly passed a vote of thanks to Walker and offered him a large Grant should he, *a reliable fighting man*, be interested in settling in that part of the world. Walker refused. With this Carolina experience Walker started a career, as the Maritime historian H. S. Vaughn would later declare, as *the greatest of English Privateer Captains*.¹¹

⁷ Manwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises...*1928, p. xxi.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Laughton, 1909, pp.513-515.

¹⁰ Manwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises...*1928, p. xxii

¹¹ *ibid.* p.1

Following the loss of the *William* during a storm, other British merchant ship owners employed Walker. By 1745 he had mastered several well-armed merchant vessels. He spent a brief period as a French Navy prisoner of war, saw numerous French and Spanish colors lowered by his cannon and took sizable prizes much to the comfort of his ships owners.¹²

The most notable ship that Walker commanded during this time was the *Boscawen*. In May 1745, in partnership with the Privateer *Sbeerness*, the *Boscawen* was successful in capturing and bringing in five French prizes to the port of Bristol. For this particular feat, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty offered congratulations. “*My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty being informed that you and the Boscawen Privateer are arrived at Bristol with 5 sail of French ships you have taken which were bound from Martinico to France, Their*

Lordships are very glad to hear of your good success, and command me to congratulate you thereon...”¹³

Following the wreck of the *Boscawen* in late 1745, Walker was given command of a squadron of four ships, collectively known as the *Royal Family*. The ships were *King George*, *Prince Frederick*, *Duke* and *Princess Ameila*. The success and prestige of this squadron, was very high. During his first eight month cruise with the *Royal Family* Walker captured prizes valued at upwards of 220,000L.¹⁴ By July of 1747 Walker’s fleet consisted of six ships, mounting 114 carriage guns and manned by a total of 1000 men.

Walker went on to other distinguished actions including a courageous battle with the huge 70 gun Spanish battleship *Glorioso*. (Figure 2). This particular battle was favorably reported in



Figure 2: Capture of the *Glorioso* 1747, courtesy of the National Maritime Museum. Painting by Charles Brooking. (BHC0371)

¹² Manwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises.....* 1928, p.xxii

¹³ Manwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises...1928*, p.xxix

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. xxxix.

the London Daily News¹⁵. The brush of marine artist Charles Brooking recorded this and other sea actions by Walker. Several of these paintings are housed in the Gallery of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England.

With the return of peace, George Walker assumed command of a vessel in the North Sea trade. It was here that Walker became interested in the fishing industry, an interest that would, a decade later, entice him to once again cross the Atlantic. Walker was a charter member of *The Society of the Free British Fishery*, established 1750, and he is known to have written and published at least one pamphlet on the fishing industry.¹⁶ He was, in particular, intent on reviving the British herring fishery and also branching into cod and ling. Walker was instrumental in charting Scotland's coastal waters and it was there he established several fishing communities involving the settling hundreds of families.¹⁷

The following is taken from a piece of contemporary literature, perhaps even written by Walker himself.

“Captain Walker, late commander of the Royal Family Privateers, in which station he behaved with uncommon Conduct and Bravery, is about taking a long lease of the Island of Arran for

*himself and some other gentlemen in order to improve it for the fishery; a most laudable example of true Patriotism, first boldly to wage war with the enemies of his country and then to employ the Reward of his Dangers and Toils in improving the same at home”.*¹⁸

Walker's 1750s initiatives and successes with establishing fishing posts in Scotland are especially important for our understanding of his slightly later efforts in New Scotland/Nova Scotia.

Throughout his sea career Walker had “*won wide respect for his seamanship, daring tactics and courtesy to his prisoners.*”¹⁹ From all accounts he was an honest and compassionate man. He would sometimes advance crews wages from his own pocket when owners were tardy with payments. Unfortunately, Walker's judgement of character sometimes seems to have been far too gracious. Bookkeeping disputes arose with the greedy and very politically influential owners of the *Royal Family*. By 1757 Walker was financially bankrupt and imprisoned for debt. His first twelve months *in close confinement* are said to have ruined his health.

In 1762, having had his case heard before the House of Lords, Walker was finally released and cleared of all charges.²⁰ Very shortly after, with the backing of one *worthy gentleman*, Commodore George Walker sailed for Nova Scotia where new prospects and a new life awaited.

¹⁵ Illustrated London News 1939

¹⁶ Ibid., p.xlvii

¹⁷ Mamwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises....* 1928, p.xlvii

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.xlviii

¹⁹ MacBeath 1977 p.252

²⁰ Mamwaring, G.E., *The Voyages and Cruises*, 1928, p.xlix

Northern Nova Scotia Fishery and Settlement

George Walker's name first appears in a Nova Scotia document that is dated February 22, 1764. On that date, Lieutenant Governor Montagu Wilmont issued "*A Short Commission of the Usual Tenor under the seal of the Province appointing George Walker Esq., during pleasure, one of her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Halifax in the said Province of Nova Scotia...*"²¹ While Walker introduces himself to Halifax and explores the opportunities of the Nova Scotia coastline, it becomes important for us to have some understanding of the circumstances within which he will shortly establish his fishing/trading business at Nepisiguit.

From 1745 until 1763 there are repeated government references as to the value of the fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and along the Acadian coasts. Some would agree that "*British aspirations to monopoly over the entire fishery was the only argument of a solidly commercial kind for the grand ambition of expelling the French from North America.*"²² Following the first years of Acadian Expulsion, New England planters and fishermen were encouraged to settle the fertile Nova Scotia marshlands and the coastal fishing villages. By 1761 shiploads of settlers had established themselves in the more southern regions.²³ Areas to the north of the isthmus townships of Cumberland and Sackville, however, remained relatively

unpopulated by British subjects. There was a continuing fear of the northern Acadians and their Native supporters.

Nepisiguit, on the south shore of Bay Chaleur, had one of the largest Acadian populations to have escaped the early deportations. However, the colonial office at Halifax believed that "*so long as the French peril remained, official efforts to promote the settlement of (northern) Nova Scotia could yield no results.*"²⁴ In late October of 1761, one Captain MacKenzie, with about 50 Highlanders under orders from Halifax, swept into Nepisiguit harbour and removed about one hundred eighty residents, approximately half of the Nepisiguit Acadian population.²⁵

A few days before MacKenzie's action, a Massachusetts trading vessel and her merchant owner Gamaliel Smethurst visited Nepisiguit. His vessel, under license from the Governor of Quebec, had just loaded with one hundred and twenty tons of dry fish, oil, etc. Smethurst was much disturbed by the abrupt military action as he had already made arrangements with the Acadians and Mi'kmaq to prepare him five thousand quintals of fish and four thousand weight of beaver, etc. for the following year.²⁶ Sumerhurst provides a good impression of the value of trade to be had in the Bay of Chaleur.²⁷

²¹ Lieutenant Governor's Commission Papers (1749-1766) Book 164, p.239.

²² McNutt 1965 p.27.

²³ Ibid. pp.60-61.

²⁴ Ibid. pp.60.

²⁵ Ganong 1905, p.365.

²⁶ Ibid., p.365-367.

²⁷ Ibid.

On his return trip from Nepisiguit to Halifax in November of 1761, Smethurst lodged with his friend Captain William Allan at Cumberland. Allan was a prominent resident of Cumberland who had first arrived in Halifax in 1749 as a quartermaster aboard the 631 ton ship *Wilmington*.²⁸ He was later commissioned as the Cumberland Collector of Tax and Duties (February 1762), First Lieutenant in the Cumberland County Militia (June 1762) and Justice of the Peace for that township (October 1762).²⁹

Despite the recent experience of his friend Smethurst, Allan was convinced that there was still business to be conducted and profits to be made in northern Nova Scotia. In 1763 William Allan petitioned for and received a "*License to Occupy, for the purpose of Fishing, the Bay of Chaleur*."³⁰ In April 1765 Allan was also granted "*License to traffic with the Micmack Indians in the North and East parts of this Province*..."³¹ No documents have been found to suggest that Allan ever established a shore settlement in the north. Like Smethurst, his efforts would appear to have consisted of seasonal contacts to carry on the fishing/trading business.

²⁸ Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild (<http://istg.rootsweb.com/1700/wilmington174906000>)

²⁹ Lieutenant Governor's Commission Papers (1749-1766) book 164, pp.164-173.

³⁰ Nova Scotia Land Registry, Land Grantees List 1738-1811, Vol.371.

³¹ Lieutenant Governor's Commission Papers (book 1759-1766) p. 364.

George Walker - Nova Scotia Fisherman/Trader

George Walker most likely arrived in Halifax during the 1763 sailing season. It is stated in a 1770 Memorial that he, “*about seven years (ago) carried a large cargo of salt and a quantity of fishing implements in his own ship to America to promote the fishing trade on the coasts of Nova Scotia, northwards of Saint John’s and having largely entered in that branch of trade and commerce and established settlements on shore, has the opportunity, experience of making some observations thereon...*”³² This document not only confirms Walker’s year of arrival but also gives a clear impression of his business intentions.

While he was granted a Commission of Justice of the Peace in Halifax in early 1764, it is only in the year 1768, with the financial backing of the London merchant Hugh Baillie (also spelled Bailley), that George Walker actually settles at Nepisiguit (Figure 3). A note in the Memorial of John Schoolbred, who later purchases Baillie’s interest in the settlement, confirms the fact, “*that in the year 1768, Mr. George Walker, who had formerly rendered essential services to his country during the command of the Royal Family privateers, settled in the Bay of Chaleur, in the province of Nova Scotia.*”³³



Figure 3: Nepisiguit Harbour with Walker’s establishment marked on the Point at Harbour entrance circa 1770. Photo courtesy of New Brunswick Provincial Archives (Ref. RS686C, G4/2)

Figure 4: Approximate area of George Walker’s 1768-1778 establishment, Alston Point, Youghall Park, looking towards Nepisiguit/Bathurst Harbour, July 1996.



³² George Walker Memorial 1770.

³³ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

Complete with men and equipment Walker sets up a trading post/fishing station at Alston Point, Nepisiguit. One can only assume, based on his previous accomplishments in Scotland that Walker was, by 1768, very familiar with the Nova Scotia coastline, fishery and trade. The move to Nepisiguit may or may not have been prompted by encountering in Halifax, Captain William Allan, who in that same year takes a Commission of Justice of the Peace for Halifax County.³⁴ Captain Allan also receives a Commission or contract to seasonally watch over the English fishing interests in the Bay of Chaleur.³⁵

With his generous and trusting nature and his background in the protection of trade, George Walker is successful in establishing the first permanent British trading/fishing station in the Bay of Chaleur. From the first hand description of his Alston Point settlement given at the beginning of this narrative, it is clear that George Walker planned to stay, to encourage settlement, to profit from the trading and fishing business and to protect his investments by force if necessary. His splendid and elegantly furnished Alston Point summer residence, five large stores, out houses and gun battery surrounded by lawns and gardens depict a thriving business. That he had built another large winter dwelling house at Youghall near the head of the harbor and established a fishing station on the Nepisiguit River suggests his complete commitment to the venture.³⁶

In 1764 George Walker had been issued his Commission as Justice of the Peace for Halifax County and, from the record, he clearly transported this appointment with him to

Nepisiguit. Several documents refer to his authority. For example, in the spring of 1768 Alexis Landry returned to his home at Caraquet from which he had been earlier forcefully removed. Archival papers of the Landry family indicate that Alexis Landry was doing business with the merchant George Walker and a Charles Ross from Nepisiguit on September 7, 1768.³⁷ On March 13th, 1769, George Walker, the *Magistrate at Nepisiguit* gave Landry official permission to settle on the land that he had occupied in 1761.³⁸

Although Commodore Walker was no stranger to challenges and adverse conditions, on March 3, 1770, he prepared a Memorial addressed to the right honorable, the Lord of Trade and Plantation.³⁹ The *“sole justice of the peace all the way from Chaleur Bay to Bay Verte, requested...a separate governmental establishment for this vast and lonely region. Along the entire coast there were only twenty British families...”*⁴⁰ This plea for a separate authority was ignored and no sub-governor was ever appointed for the north.

Walker's concerns about the state of law and order in the northern province did not deter the continuing efforts of he and his financial backers to acquire grants in the region. On June 12th, 1770, Hugh Bailley Doctor of Laws, Hugh Bailley Jr. and Allan Auld merchant, asked that Walker make application for several extremely large northern Nova Scotia land tracts. The tracts would encompass all the good fishing districts of Restigouche, Belledune, Nepisiguit, Caraquet and virtually all of what was not already granted to Davidson and Cort on the Miramichi River system.

³⁴ Lieutenant Governor's Commission Papers, middle book, p.61.

³⁵ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

³⁶ Robert Cooney 1832, pp.171-172.

³⁷ Notes of Placid Gaudet, Le Moniteur Acadien, April 5, 1889.

³⁸ Alexis Landry, Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol.4.

³⁹ Memorial of George Walker, March 3, 1770.

⁴⁰ W.S. MacNutt 1965:63

This 1770 request included a plea for *“ten thousand acres of land at Nipisiguit in the said Bay of Chaleur with the rivers and fisheries there unto belonging in the name of George Walker, late commander in chief of private ships of war, now of Nova Scotia, also one thousand acres at Belldoune with the beach and pond where the said Walker has carried on his fishery and made great improvements.”*⁴¹

Lord William Campbell, then Governor of Nova Scotia, apparently looked upon the above grant application with favor, however, he passed the application on to the then Secretary of State, Lord Hillsborough. Campbell’s note accompanying the grant request stated that it was the intention of the applicant, *“a Scotch gentleman, named George Walker,...to settle these lands with people from the Orkneys”*.⁴²

While the above request was being passed from one government official to another, a rather discouraging situation for Walker transpired in the colonial office. After two years in the Bay of Chaleur *“establishing a trade with the Indians...and taking the proper steps to carry on a cod fishery on the Coast”* Walker journeyed to London on the business of the above grant request.⁴³ While Walker was temporarily away from his station, Captain William Allan, who had been cruising the coasts of Bay Chaleur in the man-of-war *Glasgow*, presumably as a protector of the British inhabitants and their trade, applied for and received a 2000 acre grant at Nepisiguit.⁴⁴

Apparently the 2000 acre Allan Grant encompassed Walker’s homes, stores, and his growing fishing/trading establishment at Nepisiguit. Upon his return to Nova Scotia, Walker had no alternative but to buy out

Allan’s rights. This he did, with the backing of his merchant friend Hugh Baillie, for the sum of 600L sterling.⁴⁵ Allan does not appear to further interfere with Walker and in the early 1820s the *Allan Grant* is escheated.⁴⁶

On April 19th, 1771, Walker’s attorney, Allan Auld applies once again for a land grant of fifteen thousand acres in Nova Scotia. The application reads in part, *“To the Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners for the trade and plantations, the petition of George Walker, formerly commander in chief of the Royal Family’s private ships of war. Humbly Sheweth; That your petitioner being willing to lay out a considerable sum of money in carrying on the fisherys and settling lands in Nova Scotia, provided your Lordships will grant him such a tract of land as will make it worth his attention”*.⁴⁷ Again, this petition does not appear to have been addressed. Even with such setbacks, Walker was able to push on the Nepisiguit settlement. In the three years from 1770-1773, Hugh Baillie shipped approximately £10,000 of trade goods to Walker’s Nepisiguit stores.⁴⁸

By early 1775, due to competing business interests in the West Indies, Hugh Baillie sells his rights in the Nepisiguit venture to the merchant John Schoolbred of London. Mr. Schoolbred continued to finance the Alston Point establishment with George Walker as his manager. In his Jan. 17th, 1775, Memorial to the Earl of Dartmouth, John Schoolbred describes the settlement at Nepisiguit while requesting property be granted to him so he may also carry on a landed fishery at Restigouche, another location already frequented by Walker.⁴⁹ Of the Nepisiguit settlement where Walker is in charge Schoolbred writes:

⁴⁵ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

⁴⁶ New Brunswick Land Petitions, New Brunswick Archives, William Armstrong, 1820...

⁴⁷ Allan Auld, Petition of George Walker. National Archives of Canada.

⁴⁸ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹ Allan Auld et al, Memorial 1770, National Archives of Canada...Nova Scotia A, vol.86:79-81.

⁴² W.O. Raymond, The North Shore, 1899, p.124.

⁴³ John Schollbred Memorial 1775.

⁴⁴ Nova Scotia Land Registry, Book 9, p.199.

*“Your Memorialist has a store house there well supplied with every commodity for carrying on the peltry, and fish trade with the Acadians, Indians, and other resident traders in the great Bay of Chaleur and its environs. Your Memorialist under the direction of Mr. Walker now employs twenty British subjects, in fishing during the summer and shipbuilding during the winter. They build vessels from 30 to 300 tons, both for private use and sale, the ironwork, cordage, sails etc. of which are sent from England. Dryer cod, and salted salmon are prepared for the Mediterranean market, barrel’d cod and mud fish for the London consumption; and the raising of corn is by no means neglected, herring and mackerel, with various kinds of lumber for the West Indies, the Bay will supply and an extensive seal fishery may be carried on upon the neighbouring coast of Labrador, from whence the Bay Chaleur is distant only 60 leagues...”*⁵⁰



Figure 5: Chaleur Bay side of wide sand beach at Alston Point, excellent for 18th C fish drying stages (June 1996)

As Walker gains a new business partner in the Bay of Chaleur and at Nepisiguit, we find him now also engaging as a middleman in an expanded trade. In 1775 Alexis Landry of Caraquet had begun shipbuilding. In 1776, he delivered to “Walker’s Company at Nipisiguit a brigantine intended for sale to a London Company”⁵¹. We may note that although Baillie first and Schoolbred second, actually financed the trading, fishing and shipbuilding of the Nepisiguit establishment, it was Walker who oversaw the day to day business here as well as at Belledune and Restigouche. It was Walker whose personality, perseverance and humanity won the respect of the other British, the Acadians and the Mi’kmaq of the region.

Walker’s knowledge of the fish trade was well regarded. One letter tells a 1776 story of how Mr. Walker, while visiting Bonaventure, was asked to give his expert opinion on the quality of two batches of preserved salmon from the Restigouche River where William Smith and Robert Connor both had fishing stations. The outcome of the judgement was not questioned, both parties being pleased to present their wares before the master trader.⁵² Another later letter refers to the late George Walker as the discoverer of this very excellent harbor (Nepisiguit) and remarks that Walker had a keen eye for opportunity. He had sent clay samples from Nepisiguit harbour back to England for assessment. The clay proved to be of a quality equal to that called Queens Ware.⁵³

⁵⁰ John Schollbred Memorial 1775.

⁵¹ MacBeath, Alexis Landry, Dictionary of Canada Bibliography

⁵² John Schollbred Memorial 1775.

⁵³ W.O. Raymonmd, The North Shore... 1899, p.129.

That Walker had become a respected authority and perhaps even a friend to the Native population is also indicated. One document states that *“they (Indians) been frequently cam to a settlement in the Bay of Chaleur called Nipisiguit where a gentlemen resides that was appointed a naval officer a few years ago, he is the only civil, military, or ecclesiastick officer of these parts, his residence is ...side of the Indians and upon which occasions of the following, they apply to him for relief -vizt- to settle differences and disputes amongst them, baptize their infants, perform the ceremony of marriage and bury their dead, at best those of them that live near where he resides...at the aforesaid settlement of Nipisiguit, there are upward of 70 souls, including twenty Indians...”*⁵⁴

Walker had settled well into life on the north shore and for a full decade, he contributed considerably to the economic and social development of the region. He traded with all it's inhabitants, appeared to be respected by the same and *“continued, both by example and influence to advance and improve the country until his spirited and beneficial enterprize was interrupted by the war between Great Britain and her revolted Colonies.”*⁵⁵

With the American invasion of Canada at the end of 1775, Nova Scotia communities pondered their loyalties as fears of being raided mounted. During the summers of 1776 and even more so in 1777, America Privateers *“plagued trade and conducted general warfare against all territory that remained British.”*⁵⁶ The raiders were generally out to plunder for profit. It made little difference as to who or what they destroyed.

For the northern coastal posts like Walker's at Nepisiguit, little hope for protection could be found in the garrison at Cumberland or in the fleet at Halifax. As tensions mounted the Lieutenant Governor at Halifax redoubled his efforts to fortify the loyalty of his most distinguished citizens. He offered new and reinforced old Commissions. On May 5th, 1777, George Walker's name appears in a long list of gentlemen that were appointed a Commission of the Peace. In July of the same year Walker's name again appears with another large group who are given the responsibilities of both “General Commission of the Peace and Justice of the Peace...”⁵⁷

Whether or not Walker was actually present to accept the above Commissions is not clear. The next knowledge we have of Walker he is in London. The reasons for the trip are not recorded although one historian has suggested that perhaps he wished the Commission of an armed ship that would better enable him to protect the Chaleur Bay settlements and to fight the Americans.⁵⁸ This interpretation would seem plausible considering what we have discovered about this man. Unfortunately the truth may never be known.

On September 20, 1777 at Seething Lane, Tower Street, London, Commodore George Walker dies. On September 24th his burial takes place at the *Church of All Hollows, Barking-by-the-Tower, London.*⁵⁹ This church, within blocks of the Customs House and Navy Office, then had and continues to have a special relationship with those of the seafaring community. That Walker would be interred in this particular Church yard was a fitting tribute to his life as a sea officer and a gentleman.

⁵⁴ John Schollbred Memorial 1775.

⁵⁵ Robert Cooney 1834 pp.171-175.

⁵⁶ W.S. McNutt 1968 pp.82-83.

⁵⁷ Lieutenant Governors Commission Books Nova Scotia 1759-1781.

⁵⁸ Placid Gaudet 1889 notes on Commodore George Walker

⁵⁹ Manwaring, G.E., The Voyages and Cruises...1928, p.1.

Rebels in the Bay

Less than a year following Walker's death, in the early summer of 1778, the Bay of Chaleur establishments are under threat and attack by American privateers. A letter written by Captain Watts, now in charge of the Nepisiguit post, declared *"being in the store doing some business, I was informed that the Point was surrounded by Rebels... I comply'd with their request and gave them as little as possible (provisions) and they immediately departed. Next morning... the second party of Rebels appeared in five carriers... I immediately fired one of my rope yarn guns which made such a report that the Rebels landed and took to the woods."*⁶⁰

A few days later, July 4th, 1778, Captain Watts again writes. *"This morning at day break I was alarmed by two Indian friends who told me that a party of Rebels was at their wigwams on the opposite point of the River (Caron Point). I then immediately prepared for them and called all the people together and was determined to keep the place if possible, from being destroyed... I'll defend the place as long as I can... The Americans have told the Indians that they are to be back and destroy all the stores in the Bay..."*⁶¹

In a slightly later letter from William Smith at Bonaventure to John Schoolbred (London), the desperate circumstances in the Bay for the British fishermen/traders are described. *"On the 9th two American privateers called here but finding nothing worth their notice they departed the same day for this Bay. On the 11th at night they arrived at Paspebiac and next morning seized on Mr. Robins "Bee" and "Hope", and all his stores and effects*

*ashore...The same night expresses arrived here (Bonaventure) to Mr. Roxburgt acquainting him with his immediate danger...he loaded all the valuable peltries in one shalloup and ordered her to proceed to a most secret creek in Restigouche... in another to be loaded with the most valuable merchandise with which he proceeded himself to Nipisiguit."*⁶²

Further correspondence to Schoolbred from Smith details the feelings of those British left in the Bay. *"The risk of advancing on our part is now very great for we will most certainly receive another visit, perhaps more fatal, from the Americans before it can be possible for us to leave the coast ... The whole inhabitants of this country are become enemies of the Englishmen, and I am determined to leave the Bay as early as I can... Our Gulph is swarming with American privateers...they swear revenge this Fall as they are almost certain we shall then be without protection. We mean by that time to have our stores pretty empty and as many vessels away as possible."*⁶³

No details on either the destruction or abandonment of the Nepisiguit post have yet been uncovered. It would appear from the above accounts, however, that the gun protected Watts establishment, formerly that of George Walker, was probably the last in the Bay to be plundered. Six years later, in 1784, British subjects at Nepisiguit are once again taking part in the fishing business. Both the new and former residents fondly remember the late Commodore Walker.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Letter from Captain Watts to William Smith, June 1778.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Letter from William Smith to John Schoolbred, July 8, 1778.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ W.O. Raymond 1899, The North Shore, p.129.

Summary

Although he seemingly found immediate acceptance with the Governor at Halifax in 1763, George Walker was dealt no real favors in Nova Scotia. He never received any of the grants for which he or his agents petitioned nor did he receive any response in his plea for more government control in the north. While this was perhaps due in part to the size of the grant requests, it could also be connected with the fact that he had once been a Privateer. After all, his daring seamanship and wartime heroics had often won “prizes” that outranked those taken by the Kings own ships.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the Nova Scotia fishery was considered of the utmost importance and it was George Walker who voluntarily set up a landed fishing/trading post where other British feared establish. He brought with him a company of skilled men, equipment and other goods necessary for fishing, trading and shipbuilding. He set up fishing stations on the Nepisiguit, on the Restigouche and at Belledune. He befriended and conducted affairs with the Acadians, the Mi’kmaq and the other British traders. In a word, he was successful in planting a thriving British business on the northern Nova Scotia coast only a short time after the turmoil and strife of the Acadian Expulsion.

Within a few short years Walkers success at Nepisiguit came to be jealously regarded. When his Alston Point settlement prospered he and his financiers had to deal with an act of skullduggery intended to seize his entire business. Settling the issue with the air of a true gentleman, Walker prevailed. He continued on to oversee varied business affairs and transactions that indeed encompassed the entire trade of the Bay.

In the view of marine historian Herbert S. Vaughn, Walker was a man “*singularly modest, conspicuously sincere, brave as a lion, untiring and fearless in the performance of his duty, and clever in all things but those affecting his pocket*”.⁶⁵ This description seems to suit well the man who brought the north shore of Nova Scotia into the fold as a productive British territory between 1768 and 1777. If it were not for his unexpected death, one can only imagine what continued role George Walker would next have played in this tumultuous period of our history.

⁶⁵ Manwaring, G.E., The Voyages and Cruises 1928 p.1.

Addendum: Archaeological Implications

Introduction

The foregoing summary of preliminary documentary research provides us with some insights concerning Commodore George Walker and the time he spent at Nepisiguit. Even greater exposure to this man, his endeavors and this notable piece of New Brunswick history may lie buried within the historic sites occupied or frequented by Walker and his crew. The potential of these

sites to shed further light on the last decade in the life of George Walker depends on where the sites were located and, how much disturbance, either man made or natural, has taken place at the locations since the late 18th century. These locations could, depending on their condition, hold significant historical information.

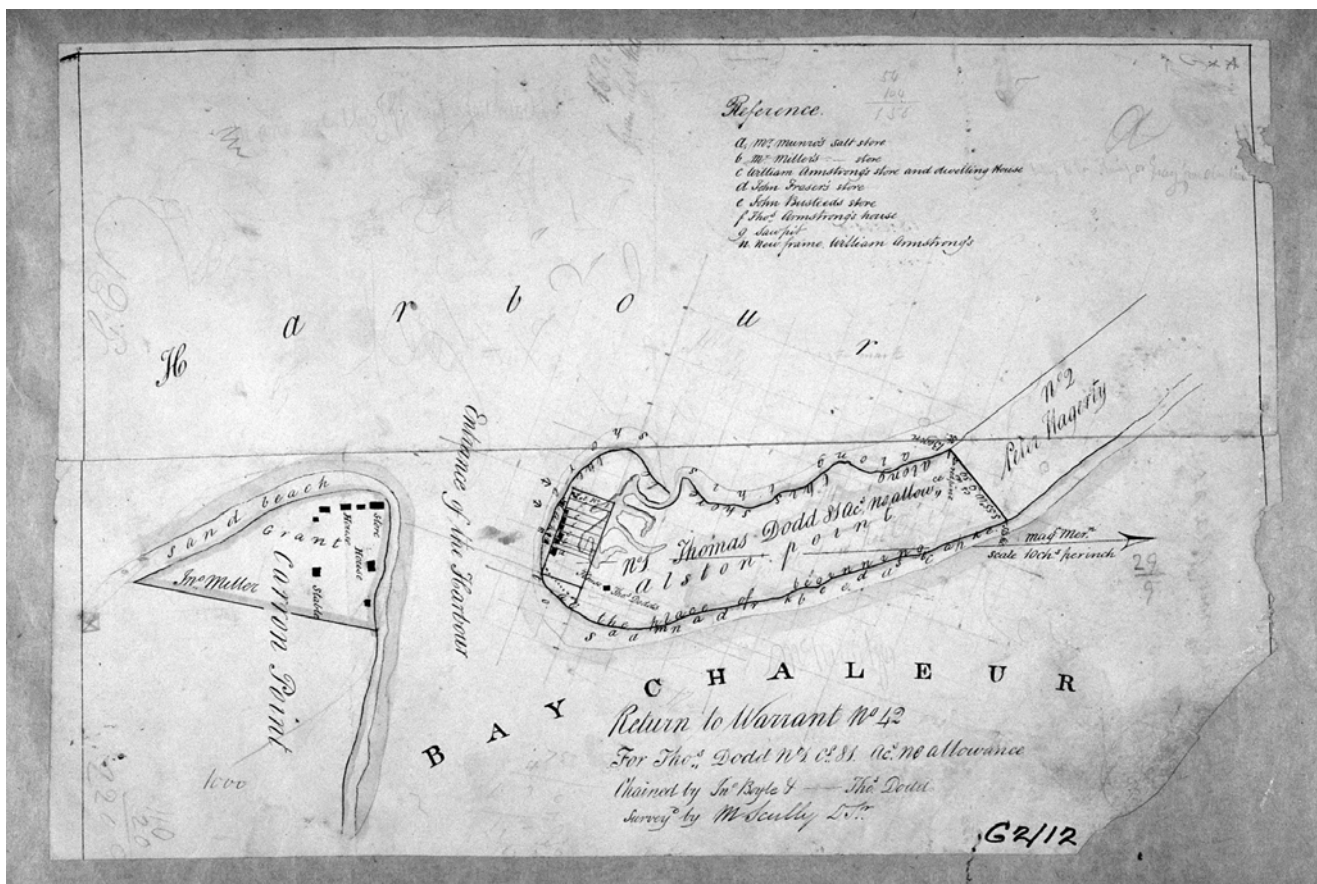


Figure 6: Early 19th century lots surveyed at the tip of Alston Point and Miller Grant shown opposite on Carron Point, circa. 1831 - Courtesy of New Brunswick Provincial Archives (Ref. RS687B4/1, G2/12)

At Nepisiguit, at least four Walker related sites are known to have existed. These sites are; on Alston Point at the entrance to Bathurst harbor; on Carron (Caron) Point opposite Alston Point; on Allan's Point/ Point au Pere (presently Ferguson Point) near the head of the harbor; and on the Nepisiguit River, approximately three miles from its mouth. Two additional sites are mentioned in the literature, one at Belldune and one at the mouth of the Restigouche River. The following briefly examines the evidence that points to the Walker connection at each of these locations. All of these sites would require fieldwork to examine the present physical condition of the properties and to explore the possibility of Walker related archaeological resources, their condition and potential.

Alston Point and Carron Point

The Walker trading/fishing establishment situated on Alston Point was detailed by Cooney as having a fine and elegantly furnished summer home, five large stores, lawns, gardens and a protective gun battery.⁶⁶ Schoolbred, the second of Walker's financiers, describes the trading post/storehouse as well supplied with every commodity for carrying on the peltry and fish business. He also mentions the raising of corn, the drying of fish and the building of ships of between 30 and 300 tons. Twenty British subjects worked at the site. Additionally, some 20 Natives, who looked to Walker for the administration of Justice, religious ceremony and trade lived nearby.⁶⁷

Whether the winter ship building activities took place on Alston Point or on another shore remains a question. The gently sloping wide sand beaches surrounding the Point

would easily lend themselves as slip ways, however, the Point itself is exposed to the harshest of the winter elements. If Walker's shipbuilding occurred at another location, this would be an archaeological site worth seeking.

According to Cooney the location of Walker's main trading/fishing post is perfectly clear. It was on the end of Alston Point. In 1778, Captain Watts, who replaces Walker as manager at the Nepisiguit, writes that the *Indians are gathered on the opposite point of the River at Carron Point.*⁶⁸ This letter, penned during the time of the American raids, clearly places the Walker/Watts store on Alston Point, opposite the Mi'kmaq camp on *Caron Point* at the entrance to the harbor. An 18th century archival map marks Alston Point with a significant establishment. (Figure 3).

The map of Nepisiguit harbor mentioned above, illustrates the 2000 acre 1770 Captain William Allan grant as well as the later 1784 Captain Goold grant. The only buildings that are indicated on this map are a circle of six small structures surrounding a larger peaked-roofed building near the end of Alston Point and, one rectangular structure on the end of *Allan's Point/ Point au Pere* at the mouth of the Tetagouche River. The cluster of buildings on Alston Point can be no other than the establishment of Commodore George Walker.

During the first half of the 19th century Alston Point played host to a number of valuable mercantile and fishing buildings owned by prominent citizens of the emerging town of Bathurst. Salt sheds, stores and at least one house were built on sub-divided lots across the end of the point. (Figure 6).

⁶⁶ Robert Cooney 1832, pp. 171-172

⁶⁷ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775

⁶⁸ Letter from Captain Watts to William Smith, June 1778.

Throughout the remainder of the 19th and into the 20th century Alston Point played a significant role in the fishing, shipping, lumbering businesses of the town. The Point provided a training area for the local Militia, an anchorage for fishing boats and later, a popular recreation area hosting picnics and band concerts. In keeping with these recreational values, the Point was designated a Provincial Park. The City of Bathurst Parks and Recreation Department currently manage the property as a Municipal Park.⁶⁹

The historic documents and maps compiled for this report and for another related document concerning the later use of Alston Point, suggest that the bulk of the significant 18th and 19th century heritage sites are concentrated within the southern end of the Point. A 1996 surface survey of the Park also found both historic period and pre-European Native sites in other areas. Some sites have been destroyed by recent developments and others, such as the 17th century D'Entremont site, have been eliminated through erosion.⁷⁰

Although modern Park developments and erosion have resulted in many physical changes, the southeastern end of Alston Point appears to have, to some extent, escaped the full force of development. (Figure 4). It is this portion of the Point that holds the greatest potential for Commodore Walker's 18th century establishment. The entire end of Alston Point requires survey and testing work to verify the nature and condition of the remaining heritage resources.

The 18th century Native site on Caron Point is not well described in the historic record. Also, 19th century maps and recent air photos suggest any site on this Point is less likely to have survived both historic and recent developments including those related to the fishery, land filling and cottage construction. An archaeological survey of Caron Point

would provide an assessment of the potential heritage value of what remains at this location.

Allan's Point or Point au Pere (currently Ferguson Point)

A second archaeological resource that could offer details concerning Walker's time at Nepisiguit, is the site of his winter home. Cooney states, *at Youghall near the head of the harbor he had another large dwelling house which he occupied in winter.*⁷¹ On Allan's Point/Point au Pere, at the mouth of the Tetagouche River, on the same circa 1770 map that marks the Alston Point establishment, one additional structure is illustrated. The building appears somewhat removed from the lowland portion of Allan's Point/Point au Pere overlooking the wide mouth of the Tetagouche River (Figure 3). Doubtless surrounding the harbor at the time were other structures belonging to the Mi'kmaq and Acadians, however, none are marked. It would appear that this map marks only the British presence and we know from the written record that circa 1770 Walker and his crew are the only planted British at Nepisiguit.



Figure 7 : Ferguson Point at the mouth of Tetagouche River

⁶⁹ Patricia Allen, Alston Point at Bathurst, N.B. Late 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries, April 2000.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Robert Cooney 1832, pp.171-172.

During a 1982 archaeological survey in search of early Acadian sites at Bathurst, Jennifer Bishop noted what appeared to be a portion of a *cut sandstone and natural granite boulder foundation eroding unto the beach on the west side of the harbor on the south side of Ferguson's Point*. Hole 15 of the Gowan Brae Golf and Country Club lay adjacent the eroding bank.⁷² No artifacts were collected to indicate a possible age for the foundation, recorded on the provincial database as CjDj-10. Along the beach on both sides of the foundation, flakes were picked up from an apparently extensive Native site, CjDj-9. Bishop noted that erosion was severe even within the protected harbor and that many sites appeared lost either through erosion or modern shoreline development.

Whether the eroding foundation found by Bishop in 1982 represents evidence of Walker's winter home remains to be seen. *Allan's Point/Point au Pere* is also the location generally accepted to be the site of Nicolas Deny's mid-17th century habitation.⁷³ This site needs to be revisited to determine if the foundation has not totally eroded away, if anything on the surrounding beach lends itself to dating and if anything worthy of archaeological attention remains. A recent conversation with the Manager of the Gowan Brae Golf and Country Club suggests erosion has been very severe along this section of beach.⁷⁴

Walker's Nepisiguit River Fishing Station

A fourth potential site of Walker's at Nepisiguit is the location of *a fishing establishment on the Big River about three miles from its entrance*.⁷⁵ Walker was annually shipping salted salmon to Mediterranean markets and this station no doubt supplied quality fish for both export and home use.⁷⁶ In the year following Walker's death, the fishery on the Nepisiguit is taken over by Colonel Arthur Goold.⁷⁷ Goold did not reside at Nepisiguit but for some years employed a number of men in the salmon fishery on the Nepisiguit River. His men worked with John Robertson who had previously been part of Commodore George Walker's crew.⁷⁸ It's quite possible that Goold's crew used Walker's previously established location for their station.



Figure 8: Head of tide on Nepisiguit River.

Approximately three miles upriver from the mouth of the Nepisiguit or Big River lies a stretch of water locally known as Connley's Pool. The pool is situated along the eastern bank of the Nepisiguit River. A Pump House rests on a rock ledge near this pool. A high tree covered rock known locally as Sheep Island lies opposite the Pump House. Connley's Pool, at the Nepisiguit head of tide, is the last calm water before the River begins a rough and rocky journey to the interior.⁷⁹

The Nepisiguit River has never been

⁷² Jennifer Bishop, A Summary of Field Activities: Bathurst Harbor Survey 1982.

⁷³ W. F. Ganong, *Origins of Settlements in New Brunswick*, Royal Society of Canada, 1904.

⁷⁴ Personal Communication Cledis Landry September 2001.

⁷⁵ Robert Cooney 1832, pp.171-172.

⁷⁶ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

⁷⁷ W.O. Raymond, "The North Shore", P. 129-132, 1899.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Gordon Allen, Personal Communication August 2001.

examined for its archaeological possibilities. An archaeological survey needs to be conducted along this section of the river. If anything remains of the Walker fishing station on the Nepisiguit, the Connley Pool area would seem a most likely location from where to begin a search.

Belledune and Mouth of the Restigouche River

In a letter to Commodore George Walker dated June 12th, 1770, three gentlemen of London wish Walker to make petitions for them to the governor of Nova Scotia. Hugh Bailley, Hugh Bailley Jr. and Allan Auld, by this letter empower Walker to ask for several large Nova Scotia land grants with associated fisheries. One of their requests asks that Walker himself be granted *“one thousand acres at Belledoune with the beach and pond where the said Walker has carried on his fishery and made great improvements”*.⁸⁰

From current maps of the Belledune coast,

there appear two locations where Walker’s fishing site could have been located. One is at Belledune Point where the smelter industrial complex currently sits. The second is at Little Belledune Point where a fertilizer plant and an expansive deep water docking terminal have been constructed in recent years. While both these locations had protected inshore basins or ponds, the main Belledune Point basin was brook fed and also had a wide beach fronting on the Bay Chaleur. Only a ground survey could identify if anything remains of the original coastline at either of these locations.

In the same letter mentioned above, the London gentlemen ask that *“thirty thousand acres of land on the south side of the River Rustigou extending from the old church upward, also including the salmon fishery therein”* be granted to Allan Auld. In the Memorial of John Schoolbred, dated January 17th, 1775, it is clear that this 1770 request had not been granted. *“Mr. Baillie did apply himself or agents for a grant of 500 acres on that river to make settlement, but by some means it was neglected to be expedited...”*⁸¹

John Schoolbred goes on to propose that he

⁸⁰ Petition of Alan Auld et al, National Archives of Canada 1770.

⁸¹ John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

“be allowed at his own proper expense...to run out and survey 500 acres of land on the Nova Scotia side of the river Rustigush and adjoining to the old Indian Church, paying such price as land ...may be deemed worth, if your memorialiste cannot be indulged with it from his majesty’s royal bounty”.⁸² Further reference to the Restigouche fishery and Walker’s involvement is revealed in the same Memorial. *“The salmon fishery has but lattely become an object of attention: the principa place of carrying it on is in the river Rustigush, which lies at the head of the Bay of Chaleur, and has a communication with it for vessels of small burthen. To this river people employed by your memorialist have resorted, but there are no settlements on either side of the river, the carrying on the business in it present state is attended with much inconveniency...”*⁸³ That Walker over saw the entire business in the Bay, for first Baillie and then Schoolbred, speaks to his involvement with the Restigouche fishery.

Schoolbred was successful in his 1775 petition and *“on May 7, 1776 he received from the Governor and Council of Nova Scotia 5,000 acres on the south bank of the Restigouche. The grant ran from Walker’s Brook to Point Henry farther up the Restigouche, and included a ten mile stretch of the river.”*⁸⁴ Later documents indicate a shore station was built at Restigouche under the direction of William Smith and that this post is destroyed in July of 1778 by American privateers.⁸⁵ A systematic search of the coastline upriver from Old Mission Point at Atholville may yet give some indication of the shortlived 18th century Walker/Schoolbred/Smith establishment. The name *Walker’s Brook* lives on in the community today.

⁸² John Schoolbred Memorial 1775.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ MacBeath, The Story of the Restigouche, 1954.

⁸⁵ Letter from William Smith to John Schoolbred July 1778.

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