

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD  
OF CANADA

TITLE: Barachois Buildings, Paspébiac, P.Q.  
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Four structures on the barachois, Paspébiac, P.Q., and presently part of the complex owned by the Quebec Ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce are discussed below. Known as buildings No. 231, 232, 234 and the poudrière, these are shown on the site plan (Figure 1) and are threatened with future demolition because of a planned industrial park.

The site is extremely picturesque, projecting into the Bay of Chaleur and busy with the activities which accompany small fishing craft and quayside anglers. (Figure 2). The broad lagoon or barachois on which these buildings (and others) are situated extends along a wide sand bar bent into an elbow at its middle and open to the sea only at the side close to shore by a narrow passage through which the tides enter and retreat. Thus, the Paspébiac barachois encloses a great triangle of water. Other barachois are located elsewhere along the Gaspé coast at Port Daniel, Grande-Rivière, Barachois, Douglastown, Gaspé Basin, and Carleton. Paspébiac takes its name from the Micmac Indian Tachkibiak which is thought to mean "tumbled by water" and, thus, is related to the distinct geography of the place.

The history of the Paspébiac barachois is closely connected with the history of Charles Robin and Company, one of the first well syndicated businesses in North America after the Hudson Bay Company to be directed to a single definite end. After the fall of Quebec, capitalists from the Channel Islands had become interested in the Gaspé fishing. The Robin's were established on the Bay of Chaleur in 1764 (Charles Robin and Company) and probably on Cape Breton as early (Philip Robin and Company). Philip and Charles were brothers. Charles landed at Paspébiac where he built a wooden house and warehouses. He obtained a permit from the Governor of Quebec to make a treaty with the savages and travelled up the St. Lawrence to find the Indian Chief with whom he bartered goods for furs. His firm unfortunately had ignored the new Navigation Act which required Jersey boats sailing for America to clear outward from an English port. In May 1767 his Endeavour coming with stores was arrested and taken to Halifax. Nevertheless, he bought new boats and carried on a profitable trade with Spain and Portugal.

The American War of Independence (1775-82) introduced new difficulties. In 1778 rebel privateers seized two ships at Paspébiac; a month later another boat was captured. Yet in June 1777 he shipped to England furs worth over £ 1000 and ten tons of whale and cod oil. In the autumn of 1778 Robin returned to Jersey where he remained for nearly five years. Returning in 1783 he opened a second center at Percé. In 1786 he wrote that he had exported that year 2,200 ton of salt cod and 1,000 casks of salmon.

Robin introduced the truck system paying his fishermen for fish caught, half in cash and half in goods from the Company stores. This was very profitable to the Company and the system lasted 99 years. In bad seasons most fishermen ran into debt with the **stores** and this put them entirely

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under Robin. In autumn 1802 Robin returned to Jersey leaving six commissioners in charge headed by his nephews neither of whom resided in the Gaspé.

Writing in 1836 the Abbe Ferland noted that  
 ...."Dans le district de Gaspé, les affaires sont dirigées, par six commis, placés deux par deux". (at Percé, Grande-Rivière and Paspébiac)

"Ces employés doivent être célibataires, ou bien, s'ils sont mariés, il ne doivent point, avoir, leurs femmes au près d'eux. On leur a imposé un règlement très sévère, entrant dans les plus minutieux détails de la conduite à tenir, et spécifiant même les plats qui, chaque jour, doivent être servis à la table..."<sup>1</sup>

The firm's name has changed with time. Originally Robin, Pipon and Company it was changed 1783 to Charles Robin and Company, which lasted until 1886 when it took the form C. Robin and Company, Limited. A few years later the title became The Charles Robin - Collas Company Limited. Up to then the capital of the business was on the Isle of Jersey and the entire transaction of fishing was carried out in accordance with orders from across the sea. In 1904 Collas and Whitman of Halifax entered and the business became the C. Robin-Collas Co., Ltd., with headquarters at Halifax. In 1910 further changes produced the Robin Jones and Whitman Company but the people of Gaspé continue to refer to it as "The Robins".

#### The Buildings

Building No. 231 (Figure 3) is a large handsome warehouse of 5 storeys. Of timber frame covered in shingle the roof is a steep gable with coyau flare at the eaves. Double-hung windows are 12 over 12 and appear to be original. Trim is flat and minimal; the only decoration is an l'oeil de boeuf in the gable peak. It is the monumentality of this structure, its great size, which makes it outstanding. An illustration published 1866 by Thomas Pye, (Figure 4) shows, perhaps, the original pattern of fenestration. Pye describes the structure as

"...the largest and most complete thing of its kind in the district of the Gaspé. It is built on a wharf, so that goods can be loaded direct from the lighters and boats which transport the cargo from the vessels lying in the roadsted, This was the first wharf erected at Paspébiac..."<sup>2</sup>

Pye further notes that in 1866 the warehouse was owned by the firm of Messrs. Le Boutillier Brothers. Founded 1838 by David Le Boutillier who had been a clerk in the Robin firm for several years, Le Boutillier Brothers were prosperous. In 1866 they had five additional establishments at Bonaventure Island, Forto, Labrador, Isle à Bois, Straits of Belle Isle, the Island of Micou which formed the entrance to the Bay of Chaleurs and at Thunder River on the north shore of the Gulf. However, the Le Boutillier enterprise was

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Ferland, La Gaspésie, pp. 116-17.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Pye, Canadian Scenery, District of the Gaspé, 1866, p.44.

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not continually successful. In 1923-4 Robin bought all of the "B.B." complex back.

On the interior the giant warehouse still known locally as the "B.B." has a large central ground floor corridor. (Figure 5). Structural detailing of these heavy squared members links the building to the huge, cavernous spaces of medieval English barns. Upper floors are huge open spaces. (Figure 6).

Building 234 near-by is another warehouse but of less imposing proportions. (Figure 7). This one and one-half storey structure is also of frame covered in shingle and boasts a contemporary corrugated metal roof. Like the "B.B." it appears to have 12 over 12 double-hung windows with simple surrounds. The Pye drawing of 1866, Le Boutillier Bros. Establishment, also shows this but with a shed added to the rear. Similarly another Pye view entitled Charles Robin and Company Establishment (Figure 8) shows this warehouse at the far right. While the buildings on the near right of the foot bridge are more particularly connected with the Robin shipyard, those to the left, of the bridge are dwelling house, shop and stores. (Several of the other structures illustrated in this view are still extant today although Robin buildings at Paspébiac were greatly destroyed in a 1964 fire). Pye also illustrated the Robin complex at Percé (Figure 9) in another view. In this the fish-drying house at the far right resembles the Paspébiac "B.B." building, although it is three, not five, storeys and less monumental.

Closeby to No. 234 building No. 232 is a small one and one-half storey structure (Figure 10). Its gable roof appears to still be covered with the original shingles. Built of brick in-fill this is covered with crepis or stucco scored to resemble ashlar. However, building 232 does not appear in any Pye illustration.

The fourth structure to be considered is, perhaps, the most intriguing. A small stone poudrière or powder magazine located further along the barachois road, this has an extremely steep roof with coyau flare. Tooled ashlar masonry on the main facade is combined with coursed rubble sides. Further detail includes a blind oval above the door. The opening of the door is a pointed ogee arch echoed in the shaped stone surround. A corner datestone reads MDCCLXXVIII. (Figure 11). Two sketch maps dated 1845 drawn by William MacDonald, land surveyor, showing the Robin complex illustrate the magazine (Figures 12-13).

The building of the poudrière in 1788 might well be explained by Robin's return to Paspébiac at that time from his Jersey sojourn and his consequent desire to prevent any repetition of the sieges which had occurred during the American Revolution. With its ogee detailing and eighteenth century date the poudrière may be placed in the Gothick revival period. This style is not the same as the later, extremely prevalent, 19th century Gothic Revival, typified by the Houses of Parliament, London, 1836 by Barry and Pugin, but may be termed a pre-Puginesque continuation of the true medieval Gothic. For example, the addition to Tom Tower, Christ Church College, Cambridge (1681-2) by Sir Christopher Wren is of this Gothick period.

In North America Sedgely near Philadelphia (no longer extant) designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe in 1799 for William Crammond is generally cited as the earliest example of the conscious revival of the Gothic (Figure 14). Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, in England commanded in 1750 by Horace Walpole was the first structure to set the stamp of fashion on the rediscovery of the charm of medieval times. In Canada Notre Dame Cathedral, Montreal, 1824, by James O'Donnell is the first Gothic Revival structure. (Figure 15).

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However, while Strawberry Hill, Sedgeley, and Notre Dame are conscious attempts to follow a fashionable style recalling the romance of the past, the Paspébiac poudrière is an unconscious (and unique) continuation of a folk building technique.

In conclusion it may be seen that these Paspébiac buildings are indeed unique. Located on the picturesque barachois they are irreplaceable remnants of an early Gaspé industry which with its breadth of influence and depth of syndication was extremely powerful. As architecture they are outstanding examples of their particular function. No other location on the Gaspé is so well identified with the firm of Robin, Jones, and Whitman. Nor does any other similar large complex remain elsewhere on the Gaspé. In addition, the poudrière appears to be stylistically distinctive, not only in Canada but, perhaps, in North America.

#### Sources

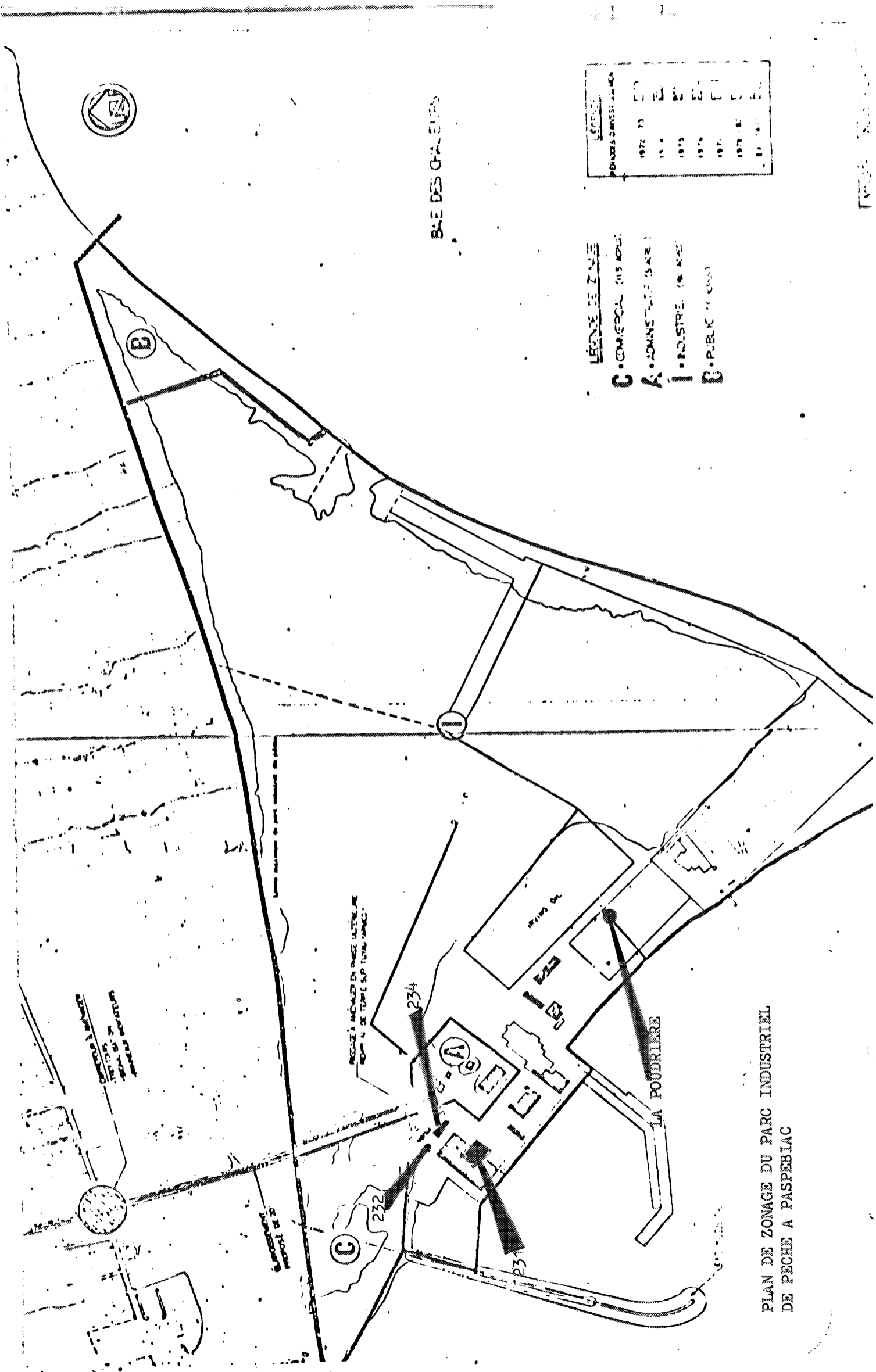
G.R. Balleine, A Biographical Dictionary of Jersey, London: Staples Press, n.d.

John M. Clarke, L'Ile Percée, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923.

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Abbé Ferland, La Gaspésie.

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LEGENDE

SYMBOLS D'AMENAGEMENT

1972-73	[Symbol]
1974	[Symbol]
1975	[Symbol]
1976	[Symbol]
1977	[Symbol]
1978-81	[Symbol]
[Symbol]	[Symbol]

- LEGENDE DE ZONE
- C - COMMERCIAL (15 ANS)
  - A - ADMINISTRATIVE (5 ANS)
  - I - INDUSTRIELLE (10 ANS)
  - B - PUBLIC (10 ANS)

PLAN DE ZONAGE DU PARC INDUSTRIEL DE PECHE A PASPEBIAC

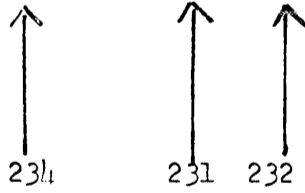
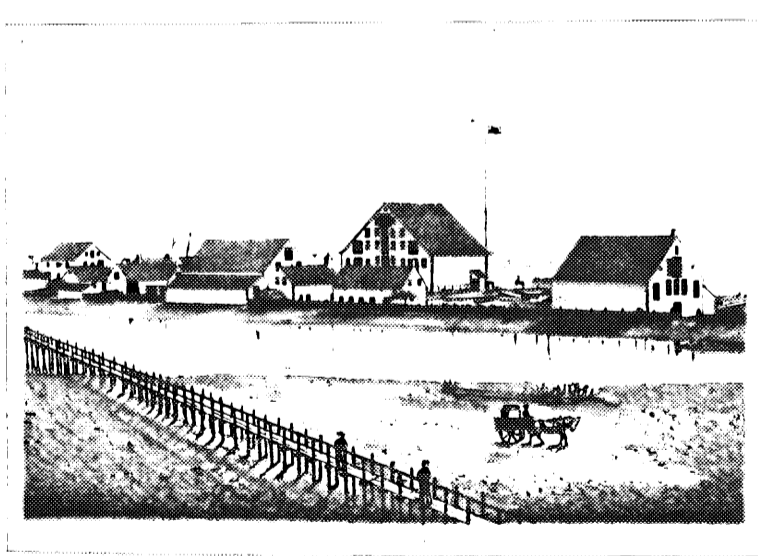


FIGURE 2 : VIEW OF THE BARACHOIS, PASPEBIAC, P.Q.

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FIGURE 3: BUILDING 231



↑  
234

↑  
231

FIGURE 4: THOMAS PYE, LE BOUTILLIER BROS.

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FIGURE 5: "B.B." WAREHOUSE, INTERIOR

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FIGURE 6: "B.B." WAREHOUSE, ATTIC



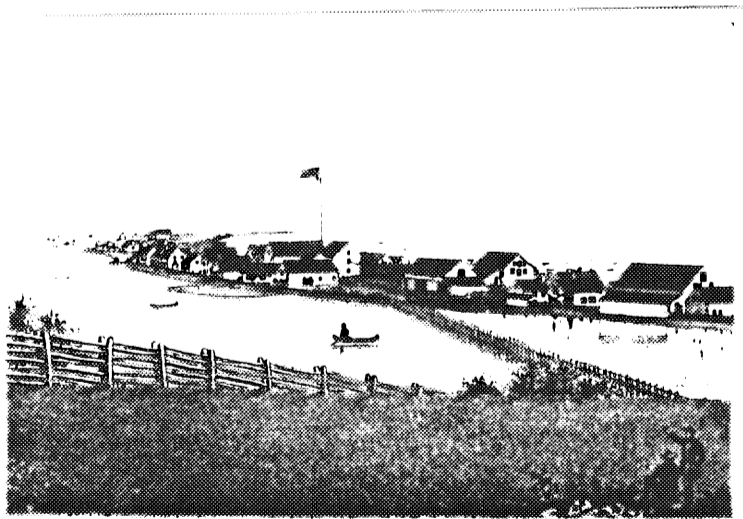
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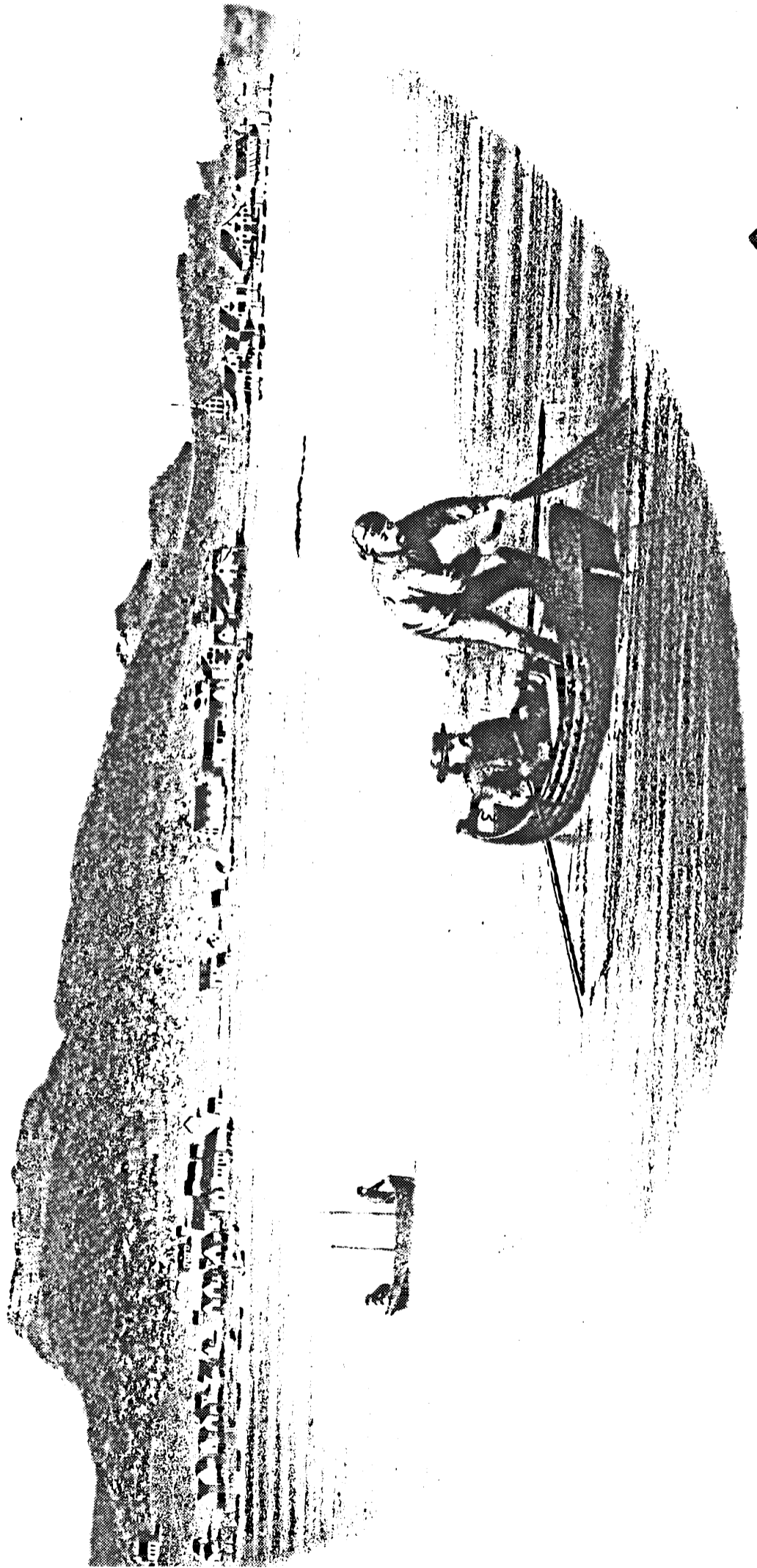
FIGURE 7 : BUILDING 234

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↑  
234

FIGURE 8 : THOMAS PYE, CHARLES ROBIN AND COMPANY



↑ fish drying house

FIGURE 9 : THOMAS FYE, PERCE



FIGURE 10 : BUILDING 232

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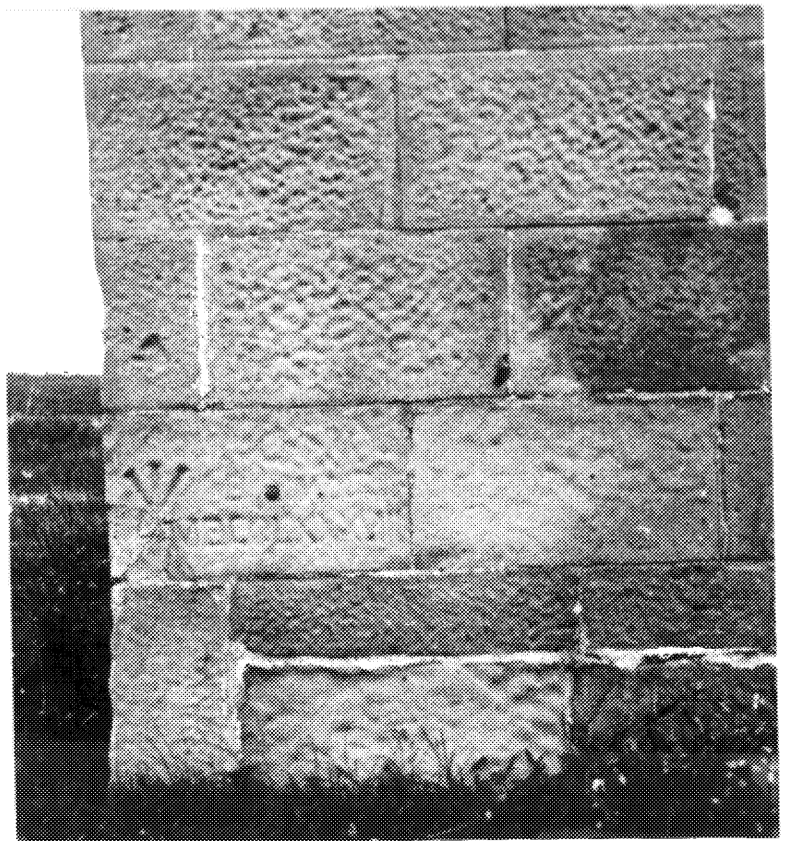


FIGURE 11 : THE POURRIERE

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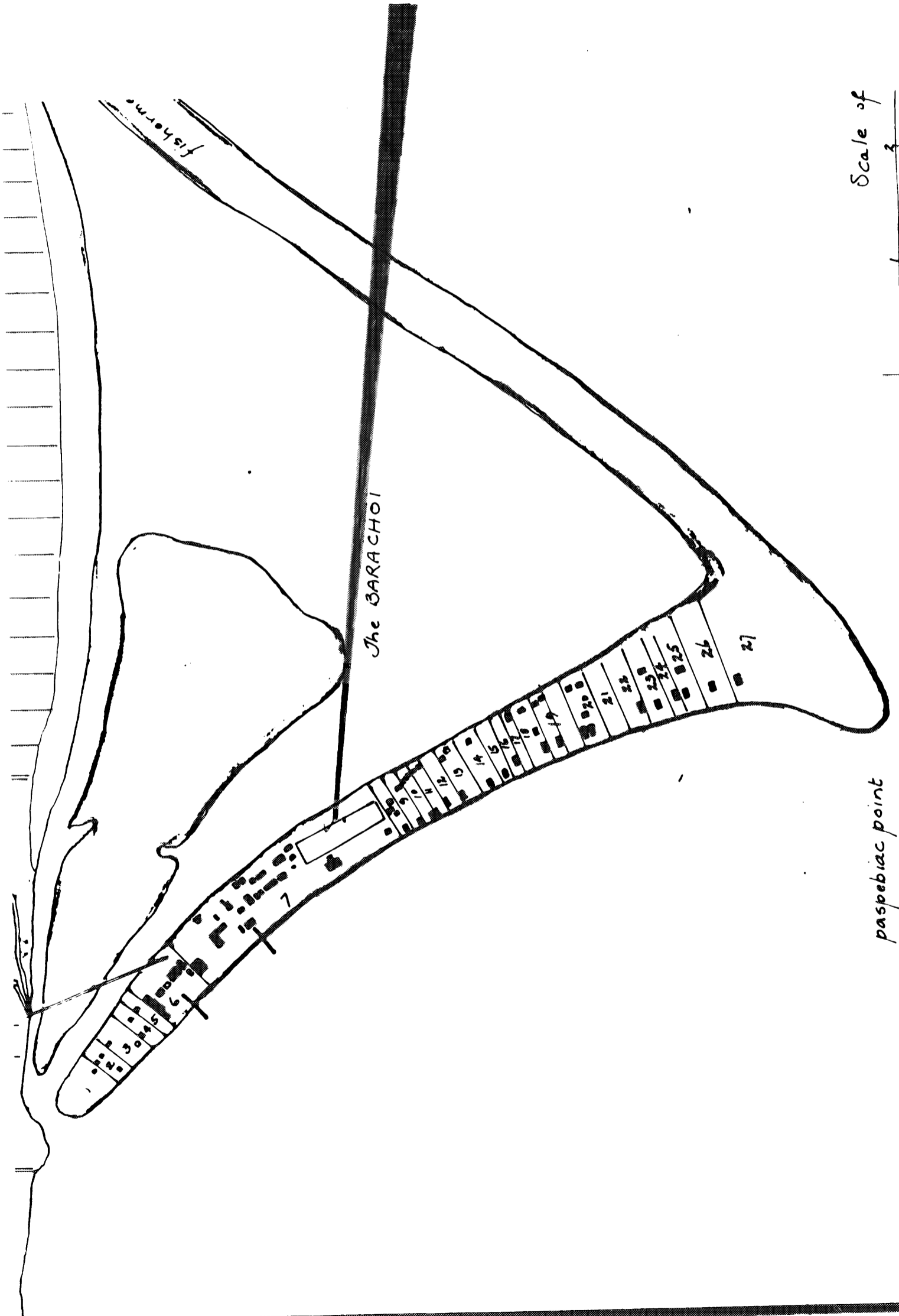
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FIGURE 12 :DETAIL OF SKETCH MAP, 1845, BY WILLIAM MACDONALD

SHOWING POWDER MAGAZINE



Scale of



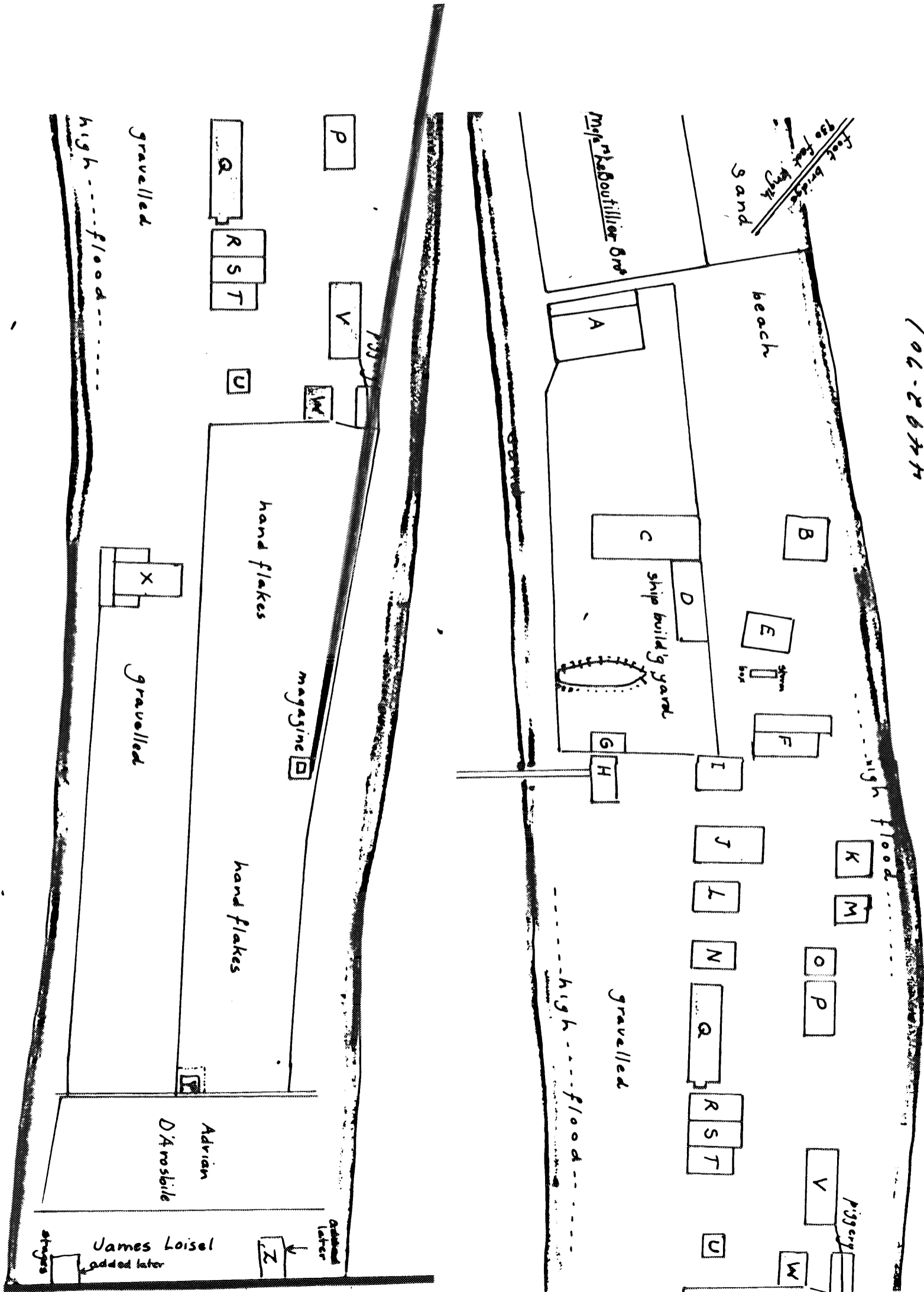
paspebiac point

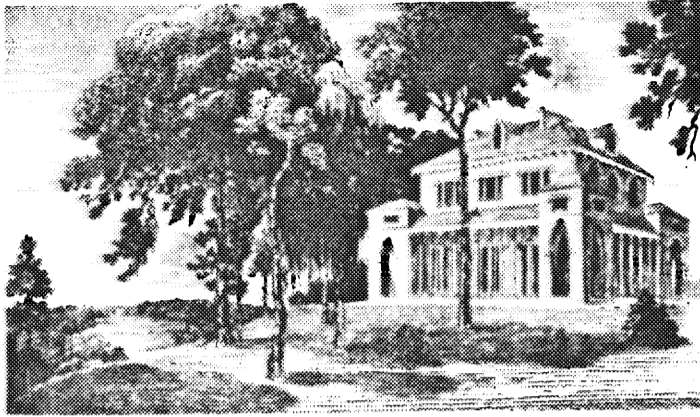
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BAY CHALEUR



FIGURE 13 : DETAIL OF SKETCH MAP, 1845, BY WILLIAM MACDONALD SHOWING POWDER MAGAZINE

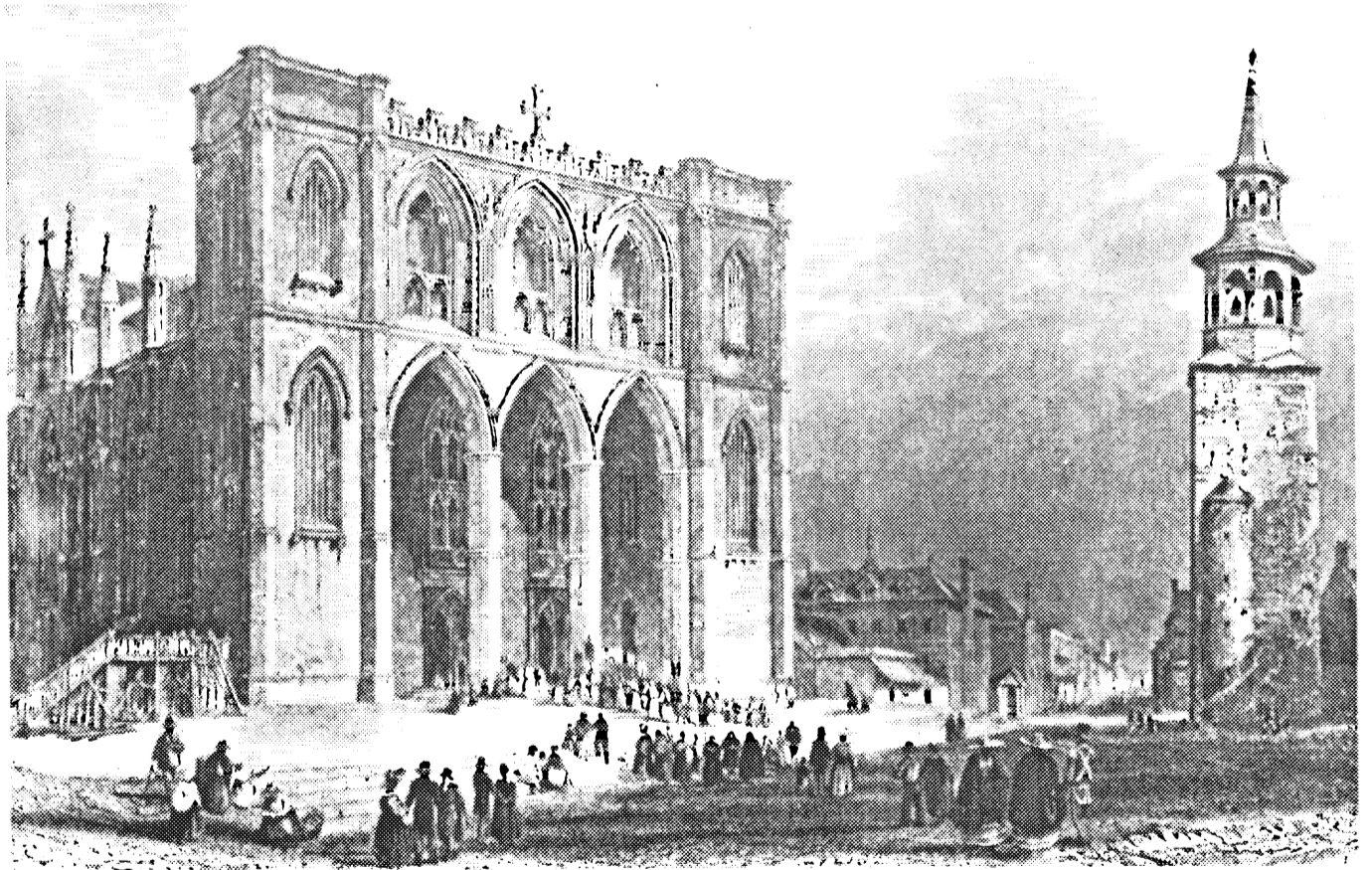




*Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society*

Residence of William Crammond, Philadelphia, Pa., 1799  
(B. H. Latrobe)

FIGURE 14 : B.H. LATROBE, SEDGELEY, 1799



28. Exterior of Notre-Dame, c. 1838.

FIGURE 15 : JAMES O'DONNELL, NOTRE-DAME, MONTREAL, 1824

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