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LOIS KERNAGHAN

## A Man and his Mistress: J.F.W. DesBarres and Mary Cannon

When Joseph Frederick Wallet DesBarres died on 27 October 1824, those awaiting the event must have been both relieved and expectant. The old surveyor, cartographer, landowner and former governor of Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island had passed from his earlier days of boundless energy and driving ambition into a gradual decline, marked by acrimony, petulance, and the bitterness of unfulfilled promise. When he died, one month short of 103,<sup>1</sup> he left not one, but two families, plus countless forgotten offspring, to contemplate the significance of his passing. In his residence at Poplar Grove in Halifax, DesBarres' recognized family had tended him during his final years, divided by petty rivalries and impatience over their father's tenacious longevity. He must have been a tedious centenarian, almost certainly senile and yet apparently active enough to celebrate his hundredth birthday by dancing on a tabletop.<sup>2</sup> The death in 1821 of Martha Williams, the woman presumed to be his wife, had done nothing to ease family tensions. Indeed, his children seemed united only in their desire to partake of his estate. An early will drawn up in 1805 had been superseded by a new one in 1818, which provided for a more equitable division of the property.<sup>3</sup> In October 1824, however, DesBarres' son James Lutterell scored a deathbed "coup" by persuading his father to add a codicil naming him an executor, and DesBarres was scarcely buried before the bickering began again.

In the Annapolis Valley, another DesBarres family also awaited his death. Since 1764, DesBarres' former mistress, Mary Cannon, had been living with their children at Castle Frederick, his residence at Falmouth, Hants County. Although she and her family had spent a half century trying to please DesBarres, they had received only acrimony and rejection in return. In 1819, DesBarres had deeded his remaining interest in Castle Frederick to Mary's

1 John Clarence Webster, *The Life of Joseph Frederick Wallet DesBarres* (Shediac, N.B., 1933), p. 9.

2 Deposition of John Sterling, physician and surgeon, 7 September 1825, Estate Papers, D49, Probate Court, Halifax County; G.N.D. Evans, *Uncommon Obdurate: The Several Public Careers of J.F.W. DesBarres* (Toronto, 1969), p. 97.

3 DesBarres Papers, Series V [DesBarres Papers], MG23, vol. 25, pp. 6074ff. and pp. 6521ff., Public Archives of Canada [PAC]. The 1805 will left all real and personal property exclusive of some specific bequests, to his wife Martha and daughter Isabella, who were also bequeathed the care and management of his lands. The 1818 will left most personal property to his wife, but all the real estate was to be sold, and the proceeds to be divided into 10 equal shares, his wife receiving 2 and the 8 surviving children the remainder. This will was not altered after the death of Martha DesBarres.

surviving children,<sup>4</sup> but the large estate had declined to a mere subsistence farm, barely capable of supporting its occupants. Since their only hope for acknowledgement and financial assistance lay in DesBarres' will, they too grimly awaited his death. However, although they had been included in the 1805 will, the testament of 1818 did not mention them. The deed to Castle Frederick was to be their only reward.

Mary Cannon is remembered today simply as DesBarres' mistress, a woman of dubious moral integrity. In some areas of Nova Scotia, she is regarded even now with embarrassment and distaste. Her role in managing DesBarres' huge Nova Scotian land holdings is rarely recalled, and the few details which are recounted usually portray her as a virago, eager to protect her own interests, or scheming with her employer to thwart the advancement of any ambitious tenant on his property.<sup>5</sup> Various local stories in Nova Scotia purport to recount DesBarres' discovery of Mary Cannon. One version has her virtually abducted by him as he was inspecting his property at Memramcook-Petitcodiac; another has her married to a Castle Frederick tenant before meeting DesBarres, and yet another claims that she was a French Huguenot countess and businesswoman from Jersey, whom DesBarres met in Halifax. The truth is less dramatic.

Mary Cannon was born about 1751, probably in Halifax, although definite proof of her parentage remains elusive.<sup>6</sup> She was presumably a thirteen-year-old girl of little or no education, when she met DesBarres in 1764. By her own court testimony given in 1810, she stated that

... in the year 1764 she became acquainted with the Complainant who paid her great attention and did by great persuasion induce this Defendant to live with him and undertake the management of his domestic concerns. That this Defendant lived with the said Complainant from the said year 1764 until his departure from this Province for England in the year 1773.

This period co-incided with DesBarres' survey work on *The Atlantic Neptune*, when he was absent from Castle Frederick a full six months out of every year. There was a very real need for a housekeeper to manage the residence during his absence, and given DesBarres' moral temperament, he was not adverse to having her warm his bed as well. According to Mary's testimony, the years between

4 Registry of Deeds, Hants County, vol. 13, p. 114. The property deeded was described as two undivided third parts, containing 7000 acres.

5 Newspaper clipping, R.V. Harris Collection, MG1, vol. 339, no. 17, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

6 *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 13 October 1827. Mary was always referred to as "Mrs. Cannon", no doubt out of deference to her position as agent/attorney. Early Halifax records show at least three Cannon households during the 1750s, but are vague as to the specific members of each. Later deed transfers and court proceedings show a shift in the families from Halifax to the Windsor/Falmouth area.

1764 and 1773 were happy ones, as her employer “treated her in every Respect as his Wife with great Affection and Tenderness and always placed the most unbounded Confidence in the Defendant”.<sup>7</sup> Although DesBarres was absent half the year, the winter months were filled with chart preparations, equipment repairs, scholarly pursuits and leisure hours. His survey crew, while small in number, was composed of well-educated naval personnel. Visitors were common, and may have included DesBarres’ former colleague, James Cook.<sup>8</sup> The atmosphere must have been stimulating indeed for a young, uneducated girl. The woman who emerged from these formative years was literate, articulate and sophisticated, to a degree found in few contemporaries with her background.

Between 1764 and 1773, five of Mary Cannon’s children by DesBarres were born: Amelia Louise Matilda Lutterell, John Frederick William, Spry Ann, Martha Sophia, and an unidentified daughter who died in September 1783.<sup>9</sup> Although DesBarres had no intention of legitimizing these children by marriage, he did grant them his surname, and promised Mary in 1774 that “whatever Property I am possessed of in any Part of the British Dominions it shall after my Death be yours and the Children’s I got with you”.<sup>10</sup> While he may have been sincere at the time, his longevity and eccentric character allowed him ample opportunity for reflection on this promise.

Mary Cannon later testified that from 1764 to 1773, DesBarres entrusted to her not only the handling of his domestic concerns, but also “the sole [and] entire Management of his Affairs in this Province. . . leaving [all] his Concerns . . . entirely to her Management at all times”.<sup>11</sup> Since DesBarres was a military veteran and held a position of some importance in the colony, he was eligible for the generous grants of land offered to the Nova Scotian establishment as reward for past service. He began with a 500-acre grant at Falmouth in 1764. Through subsequent grants, plus the acquisition of property by purchase, he added some 7,500 acres at Falmouth, 20,000 acres at Tatamagouche, 8,000 acres at Minudie, a similarly-sized tract at Maccan-Nappan, and 40,000 acres at Memramcook-Petitcodiac. By the early 1770s, he owned nearly 80,000 acres of largely undeveloped colonial land. DesBarres attempted to introduce tenant farmers to the properties, expecting great financial returns from a minimum monetary investment. Castle Frederick was developed into his concept of a

7 Testimony of Mary Cannon, case 179, Chancery court, RG36, PANS.

8 John V. Duncanson, *Falmouth: A New England Township in Nova Scotia, 1760-1965* (Windsor, Ont., 1965), p. 29.

9 See vital records for Windsor/Falmouth/Newport, St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Halifax. Only the burial is cited.

10 DesBarres to Cannon, quoted in testimony of Mary Cannon, *op.cit.*

11 *Ibid.*

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country estate suitable for a member of the colonial gentry.<sup>12</sup> From initially assisting DesBarres, it is probable that Mary Cannon progressed to overseeing his business affairs during his annual absences, reporting fully to him on the extent of her proceedings, but consulting with him only for final decisions. How thorough her training was is questionable, but she apparently grasped the essentials of agricultural and financial management.

In 1773, DesBarres returned to England to supervise publication of *The Atlantic Neptune*. With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, his charts assumed a new strategic importance, but several years' work was required to complete the project and in the interim he needed someone to manage his Nova Scotian properties. Mary Cannon was his solution. She already understood the basic principles involved, and had considerable preliminary experience; the inducement of inheriting his land holdings would guarantee her continued diligence and fidelity. Accordingly, he wrote in June 1774 that he wished her

. . .to be acquainted with. . .every. . .account in which I am concerned [in Nova Scotia] in order that you might know what step to take should any accident happen to me or in case I should die before you. . . I would therefore have you apply yourself to the Knowledge of every Part of our Lands & settlements and take an exact account of the state and condition, cattle, etc. of each of them. . . send me the minutes of your agreements [with tenants and new settlers] and I shall make out and execute Leases thereof which I shall send to you. . . In short my Dear Polly, act with all the Prudence you are capable of and I make no doubt but that I shall have reason to be satisfied [*sic*].<sup>13</sup>

These instructions were given legal sanction in 1776 by a power of attorney, in which DesBarres appointed Mary Cannon

. . .to act, transact and perform all and every thing whatever relative to my Concerns, Properties and Estates whatever. . .lying in the province of Nova Scotia and the Person of me the Constituent to represent in all affairs, giving my said Agent and Attorney my full Power and Authority in and about the Premises and hereby holding firm and valid whatever my said Agent and Attorney shall. . .lawfully do in my behalf.<sup>14</sup>

Mary Cannon's responsibilities were staggering. She was expected to visit

12 Evans, *Uncommon Obdurate*, pp. 27-32. Estimates of the size of DesBarres' colonial holdings vary; Webster, *Life of DesBarres*, pp. 64-7, gives a total of just over 60,000 acres.

13 DesBarres to Cannon, quoted in testimony of Mary Cannon, *op.cit.*

14 Registry of Deeds, vol. C, p. 341, Cumberland County. Although dated 1776, the instrument was not registered until 1786, nor was it registered in either Hants or Colchester Counties.

each property regularly, noting settlement, livestock and agricultural improvements. Accordingly, she visited Minudie in 1775, 1776, 1780, 1782, 1787, 1790, 1793, 1795 and 1806. In 1784, 1787, 1790, 1793 and 1801, she travelled to the Memramcook-Petitcodiac property, although the granting of a power of attorney in 1782 to Charles Baker of Cumberland relieved her of some responsibilities in that area. She appears to have visited Tatamagouche only once, in 1776; in 1785 Wellwood Waugh was appointed as DesBarres' attorney for that property.<sup>15</sup> During these visits, and from her base at Castle Frederick, Mary arranged tenants' leases and collected annual rents. From the beginning, she encountered difficulties with the tenants, who were often undependable, particularly at Tatamagouche, where she was repeatedly forced to look for new and more reliable settlers.<sup>16</sup> The French farmers at Minudie, Maccan-Nappan and Memramcook-Petitcodiac could also be capricious. They were tightly-knit, distrustful of outside interference and had to be handled with great care. As the years went by, they sought to gain ownership of their tenant holdings by having DesBarres' grants revoked. Rent collection was equally difficult. Given the currency scarcity in Nova Scotia during the late eighteenth century, payment was expected in livestock and produce, which could then be resold at a profit. The turnover of tenants at Tatamagouche, however, precluded any early returns from that property, and bad weather repeatedly played havoc with the crops elsewhere, preventing any payment whatever in some years.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as the tenants became increasingly independent, they refused to pay their rents, or else planted their largest crops on adjacent property not owned by DesBarres, so that only a token payment was extracted.<sup>18</sup>

Mary Cannon was also responsible for overseeing livestock introduction and supervision, the transferral of animals among the properties and the occasional stock sale. Crop management was another task, necessitating seed orders and attempts at quality upgrading. Property maintenance was an unending worry. The land at Minudie, Maccan-Nappan and Memramcook-Petitcodiac was largely dyked and required constant care. Agricultural expansion was dependent upon enlargement of the drainage systems, and although the French tenants were proficient in this operation, it was expensive and laborious.<sup>19</sup> Mary also regularly forwarded to DesBarres all management details for his official approval, comment and any further instructions. She dealt with sundry business visitors to Castle Frederick, presumably maintained a set of estate account

15 DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, pp. 3561-3680. Waugh's power was entered in Registry of Deeds, vol. 3A, p. 105, Colchester County.

16 Testimony of Mary Cannon, *op.cit.*

17 Cannon to DesBarres, 4 January 1790, 29 November 1790, 10 November 1792, DesBarres Papers, vol. 16, pp. 3374-5, 3378, 3415-6.

18 Amelia DesBarres to DesBarres, 28 July 1799, *ibid.*, vol. 19, pp. 3805-6.

19 Cannon to DesBarres, 28 July 1786, 4 January 1790, *ibid.*, vol. 18, pp. 3340, 3373-4.

books, ran the large Falmouth property as a model farm and residence, complete with Black slaves,<sup>20</sup> and found time to raise her family and to provide for their education. In 1779, the eldest daughter, Amelia, was boarding in Halifax at Mrs. Deborah Cottnam's school for young ladies, at a guinea per week. This establishment catered to the children of the colonial gentry, and provided an excellent education in everything genteel, from embroidery and French, to "Locke upon innate [*sic*] ideas".<sup>21</sup> During the same period, Mary's son William was boarding with the Gibbons family in Halifax, and at school was learning reading, writing, arithmetic and Latin.<sup>22</sup>

It was intended that Mary should live off the profits of Castle Frederick, while the returns from the other land holdings would be largely plowed back into property improvements and maintenance. In 1779, presumably during a difficult financial period, DesBarres sent her some goods to sell, thus enabling her to raise extra funds.<sup>23</sup> In time, she was permitted to encroach upon the profits of the other estates, but she does not appear to have ever received a salary, although she was able to charge her travel expenses to the estate account. Only once, in 1790, did she make a polite request for re-imbursement for past service.<sup>24</sup> She does not appear to have drawn surreptitiously on the estate funds for herself, and on only a few occasions did she make any requests for her children.

In late 1784, DesBarres returned to North America as the governor of Cape Breton. Initially the relationship with Mary appeared as amicable as ever. She visited him in Halifax, prior to his departure for Sydney, and the result was the final child of their liaison, a daughter named Mary. Amelia and William joined their father in Cape Breton and remained there until 1787. Meanwhile, Mary's role as business agent took on new proportions, as she arranged for shipments of produce and timber for DesBarres' personal needs, and assisted in recommending potential settlers and business intermediaries for the new colony.<sup>25</sup> By late 1786, however, their relationship, both personal and professional, had begun to sour. For the first time, the flow of letters from DesBarres slackened, and Mary was left without instructions and confirmations regarding her management of his mainland affairs. The onset of this change almost certainly co-incided with the arrival of Martha Williams in Sydney, presumably late in 1785, complete

20 Cannon to DesBarres, 28 November 1785, *ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 3329; *Acadian Recorder*, 7 April 1838.

21 Rebecca Byles to the Misses Byles, 20 February 1784, Byles Papers, MG1, vol. 163, PANS.

22 Cannon to DesBarres, 6 May 1779, DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, p. 3323.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 3322. This arrangement may have continued intermittently, since tradition claims a trading post was part of the property.

24 Cannon to DesBarres, 5 January 1790, *ibid.*, p. 3371.

25 Cannon to DesBarres, 28 July 1786, *ibid.*, p. 3340; Cannon to MacDonald, 2 September 1795, *ibid.*, p. 3420; Cannon to DesBarres, 28 November 1785, *ibid.*, p. 3327-34.

with her offspring by DesBarres during his years in England.<sup>26</sup> From that time on, Mary Cannon was in eclipse.

The rift was widened by DesBarres' weakening financial position. Twenty years of property management and development in Nova Scotia had been a serious drain on his always shaky monetary resources, and in 1783 he had mortgaged Castle Frederick to the London firm of Watson and Rashleigh, in lieu of some £4000 owed in back debts.<sup>27</sup> When the mortgage payments were not forthcoming, the creditors became impatient, and as property agent, Mary Cannon was expected to provide the necessary funds. There was no money to spare from the estates, and even when she could scrape up a meagre payment, the scarcity of currency in Nova Scotia made it almost impossible to convert bartered goods into the required hard cash. Watson and Rashleigh's Nova Scotia agent, a Mr. Turner, threatened not only mortgage foreclosure on Castle Frederick, but also seizure of sufficient additional property to satisfy new debts against the firm.<sup>28</sup> In November 1786, Mary wrote DesBarres that without his assistance, Turner would "no doubt proceed to a law process — and the expenses of again defending these proceedings is considerable without the benefit of lessening the debt".<sup>29</sup> DesBarres turned a deaf ear to these pleas and left Mary to fend for herself. In April 1787, she reported that she had made an additional token payment with £100 loaned by a friend.<sup>30</sup> In 1788, both DesBarres and Turner returned to England, apparently halting any further direct harassment of Mary for mortgage payments. Nevertheless, the conflict continued in London, and Mary's occupancy of the Falmouth property remained in jeopardy. In 1793, tired of only token installments, Brook Watson and Co. complained to DesBarres of "the many years we have waited for payment of your Mortgage Debt on Castle Frederick estate". In 1794, the property was conveyed to them with the provision that if DesBarres repaid his debt within six months, the estate would be returned. Ever the litigious soul, DesBarres had the matter arbi-

26 Smith to DesBarres, 1 September 1785, *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 871. It is still not known if DesBarres was legally wedded to Martha. In the 1818 will, she was described as his "dear wife Martha DesBarres (whose maiden name was Martha Williams of Shrewsbury, County Salop, South Britain)". She was also known as Martha Hickman Williams, and the register of St. George's Anglican Church, Sydney, in recording the private baptism of James Lutterell DesBarres, 27 May 1787, referred to the parents as Gov. DesBarres and "his Woman Martha Hickman". The records of St. George's Anglican Church, Halifax, note the burial of Martha DesBarres in 1821, and it is possible that the marriage, if it occurred, took place during DesBarres' later life, but outside Nova Scotia.

27 DesBarres to Brook Watson and Robert Rashleigh, mortgage deed, 1783, DesBarres Papers, vol. 6, pp. 1315ff.

28 Cannon to DesBarres, 20 October 1786, *ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 3346.

29 Cannon to DesBarres, 15 November 1786, *ibid.*, p. 3351.

30 Cannon to DesBarres, 29 April 1787, *ibid.*, p. 3355. Although still corresponding with her, DesBarres was evasive and appeared to be mentally retreating from the concerns of his colonial estates; see DesBarres to Cannon, 26 June 1787, DesBarres Papers, MG1, vol. 1183, PANS.



trated, a settlement sum of slightly over £1,100 was agreed upon and Castle Frederick was duly re-instated to his ownership.<sup>31</sup>

Other financial difficulties also created problems for Mary during this period. The establishment and consolidation of DesBarres' position as governor of Cape Breton had called for large financial outlays and he had relied on the assistance of Samuel Sparrow, a Halifax merchant whom Mary had recommended in 1785 as "a gentleman with whom you may deal with safety".<sup>32</sup> By 1787, however, Sparrow was claiming that DesBarres owed him in excess of £4,000 and, to extract payment, the properties at Minudie and Maccan-Nappan were attached, as well as 5½ shares of land at Falmouth, which DesBarres had conveyed to Mary in 1782. She retained Richard John Uniacke as the attorney for a court appearance in July 1788.<sup>33</sup> In November, she reported to DesBarres that "Your affair was likely to be settled and Mr. Sparrow detected in his unjust proceedings. These creditors of government had left undone nothing where in the Law would abet them but rather exceeded its bound".<sup>34</sup> The Tatamagouche property was also attached on three different occasions: by David Hall, for a debt of some £150, by Neil Robertson for an outstanding £188, and by Jonathan Tremain and Richard Stout for a claimed £1500 debt. There were further problems at Minudie, where a Halifax sailor named John Jodrid [Joudrey] had the tenants' cattle seized by the sheriff, to ensure payment of some £300 owed him by DesBarres. In every instance, Mary Cannon was left on her own, as DesBarres' attorney, to defend the properties as best she could; although Uniacke was again retained for the defense, DesBarres was found guilty in each suit.<sup>35</sup>

Since Mary could not raise the necessary funds from the estates to pay the successful creditors, in late 1788 she begged DesBarres for financial assistance: "I fear unless these cursed bills are paid the [Tatamagouche] estate will be sold, notwithstanding the mortgage to Mr. Kaser [?] which they, gentlemen of the law, at Halifax esteem a pittance and hesitate not in giving judgment against you

31 Brook Watson and Co. to DesBarres, 3 January 1793, DesBarres Papers, vol. 6, pp. 1367, pp. 1451-9. After the death of Rashleigh, the firm had become Brook Watson and Co.

32 Cannon to DesBarres, 28 November 1785, *ibid.*, vol. 18, pp. 3331.

33 Sparrow vs. DesBarres, 1787, RG39 "C", box 50, PANS. RG39 "J", vols. 8 and 9, Judgment Books, show no rendered decision for the case which was presumably settled out of court, perhaps because Sparrow was, indeed, making unscrupulous demands. The 5½ shares of Falmouth property were deeded to Mary in 1782 for the nominal fee of 5 s., and it was noted that the property was already in her possession. The transaction was not registered until 1786. See Registry of Deeds, vol. 4, p. 383, Hants County. This was the only part of the Castle Frederick estate ever owned by Mary, and the remainder was retained by DesBarres until deeded to his daughters in 1819.

34 Cannon to DesBarres, 5 November 1788, DesBarres Papers, vol. 6, p. 1126.

35 Hall vs. DesBarres, 1787; Robertson vs. DesBarres, 1787; Tremain and Stout vs. DesBarres, 1787; and Jodrid vs. DesBarres, 1787, RG39 "C", boxes 47, 49-51, PANS.

in every case".<sup>36</sup> In order to regain possession of the cattle for the tenants at Minudie, Mary had posted with the sheriff a £300 bail bond, which she also had no means to pay, and as late as January 1790, Joudrey was still trying to extract final reimbursement from her.<sup>37</sup> Her repeated requests to DesBarres for assistance went unanswered, although he appears to have made at least token repayment, gradually and grudgingly, directly to his creditors.

During these years, Mary was also involved in defending the legitimacy of DesBarres' land titles. In 1769, he had acquired a large tract of Amherst property in consequence of a debt owed him by Captain George Adam Gemelin, who contested the award in a lawsuit which spanned two decades. By 1790, the township of Amherst was claiming that the disputed land was part of the original township grant, which pre-dated Gemelin's tenure, and they were evicting tenants who had paid rent to DesBarres for 20 years. In the Memramcook-Petitcodiac area around 1770, DesBarres had purchased grants totalling some 40,000 acres but the documents had never been re-registered following the separation of New Brunswick from Nova Scotia in 1784 and by 1790 the tenants were applying for individual grants. Since no documents could be found to confirm DesBarres' ownership, the government was inclined to issue new grants, although Mary Cannon had been collecting rents and financing agricultural improvements on the properties for nearly 20 years.<sup>38</sup> In November 1790, Mary complained to DesBarres that

From your long silence, and never receiving any answers to my letters [I] conclude that by some mischance. . .you do not receive them. . . .Enclosed is a memorandum of papers wanted to defend the suit, part of the land of Captain Gmelin [*sic*] claimed to make good the Amherst grant. I have repeatedly wrote to you for the papers relating to that estate. It has been in law these three years and attended with much expence [*sic*] and trouble. . . . Pray be kind enough to send the papers. . .otherwise nothing can be done, and they will doubtlessly obtain the land.<sup>39</sup>

DesBarres remained in England, seemingly oblivious of Mary's difficulties and certainly impervious to her requests for assistance. His continued liaison with Martha Williams had resulted in a growing family by her, and Mary's offspring seemed almost certain to be excluded from their long-promised inheritance. Accordingly, in January 1790, Mary made her first and only request for financial acknowledgement of past service:

36 Cannon to DesBarres, 22 November 1788, DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, pp. 3368-9.

37 Cannon to DesBarres, 5 November 1788, 4 January 1790, *ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 1126-7 and vol. 18, p. 3376.

38 Evans, *Uncommon Obdurate*, pp. 38-9, 32-5.

39 Cannon to DesBarres, 29 November 1790, DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, p. 3377.

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In my accounts of Petitcodiac estate, have made no charges for my services and attention thereto, since the year 1775 — have left that to the generosity of Mr. Grant and yourself to determine. — It would be of much utility to me to have whatsoever you are pleased to allow sent me either in mony [*sic*] or some articles that may be useful.<sup>40</sup>

There is no indication that her request was ever answered. In November 1790, seeking assistance from DesBarres in repaying his final Nova Scotian debts, she grimly noted: "This [sum] being paid these tedious matters here are at an end and I request to draw nothing further".<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Mary's position became increasingly perilous. From 1790 to 1792, her "very bad state of health. . . prevented my attendance at the estates, also the transmitting you the particular accounts of your different estates. . . as you requested".<sup>42</sup> While the excuse was plausible, DesBarres had become concerned that his years of investment in land settlement and agricultural improvements had returned so little profit, certainly not enough to discharge the debts incurred by his other careers. From a cavalier and callous disregard for his colonial holdings, he now subjected them to intense and meticulous scrutiny. In 1794, claiming that for years he could extract no information from Mary Cannon regarding his estates, he appointed Captain John MacDonald as agent in her place, and requested him to make a detailed report on all the colonial properties.<sup>43</sup>

DesBarres apparently indicated to his new agent that Mary was allowed to use the meagre profits from all the colonial holdings to support her family and to continue the marginal operation of the estates. It was said that she managed both duties admirably. She and her children lived "genteely [,] decently and respectably" in the house at Castle Frederick,<sup>44</sup> and while the properties yielded only £300 to £500 annually, it was generally conceded that difficulties with rent collection, agricultural development and title confirmation precluded any greater returns. MacDonald's tour of the estates in 1795, however, soon convinced him that incompetent management and DesBarres' continued absence had resulted in the failure of a potentially successful venture. He was particularly critical of Mary's lease arrangements, feeling that the agreements had been contracted at a rent level which much favoured the tenants. As he continued his investigations, he also uncovered a scandal which placed Mary Cannon's integrity into

40 Cannon to DesBarres, 4 January 1790, *ibid.*, p. 3371.

41 Cannon to DesBarres, 29 November 1790, *ibid.*, pp. 3379.

42 Cannon to DesBarres, 10 November 1792, *ibid.*, pp. 3414-5.

43 Registry of Deeds, vol. D, p. 248, Cumberland County. The instrument was registered in 1795 and gave MacDonald authority in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Although this co-incided with a period during which Mary was lax regarding her work, it is possible that letters from her were not reaching DesBarres, since in her correspondence after 1786 she made repeated reference to letters posted for which she had received no replies.

44 MacDonald to DesBarres, 15 November 1795, DesBarres Papers, vol. 19, p. 3919.

serious question. What had begun as tenants' gossip was soon substantiated by a meeting with Mary's son, William DesBarres, who revealed that his mother was involved in a flagrant liaison with an Irish labourer who had been employed at Castle Frederick. On at least one occasion, William had fought with the newcomer, whose position nevertheless remained firm in Mary's affections. In disgust and humiliation, her children had either left home or had been forced out, and were then residing at Minudie. William supplied the additional information that his mother had been tallying up an account against DesBarres for years, and that it exceeded £4,000. Furthermore, her advisor and personal friend in Windsor, Major George Monk, was counselling her to attach DesBarres' properties to secure payment of this large debt.

MacDonald was emphatic in demanding DesBarres' immediate return, since he was greatly worried that the threat to sue would be carried out. At the same time, he warned his employer that discretion was necessary: "But do not fly at it, be Moderate — Keep your Mind to yourself: by so doing it is possible some unguarded fraud will peep out in it, which will level the whole fabric with the ground: to be sure she has constructed it artfully, but perhaps so much the more easily to be discovered — Keep cool. . . . Do not let perdition come by delay". In MacDonald's opinion, an immediate settlement with Mary was necessary, and he recommended that she be evicted from Castle Frederick and given lodging at Minudie. In the interim, he registered his power of attorney at Amherst, to override any "possibility of an Attempt to do a wrong thing. . . on her part" and since he could not remain in the area, he authorized William DesBarres to collect any rents from the Cumberland properties.<sup>45</sup>

It is evident that there were problems between Mary and her children during this period. In 1794, she leased property at Minudie to William,<sup>46</sup> who continued to reside there until his death in 1800. By 1799, Amelia, Spry Ann and Sophia had leased a small farm at Horton, where they continued to live for many years. Only the youngest daughter, Mary, remained with her mother at Castle Frederick.<sup>47</sup> John MacDonald noted that "every body whatever talks handsomely of the young Ladies as being fine women & having excellent dispositions and accomplishments". It was, therefore, no doubt very distasteful for them to see their mother involved with a common labourer. It is also probable that all the children were alarmed by their financial prospects, since MacDonald also reported that William was

. . . very moderate in his expressions, as the subject [Mary's liaison] must be painful to him. He has. . . had little opportunity to be anything of a

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 3921, 3922.

46 Registry of Deeds, vol. E, p. 38, Cumberland County. The terms provided for 1000 acres at £5 per annum, for 999 years.

47 Amelia DesBarres to DesBarres, 28 July 1799, DesBarres Papers, vol. 19, p. 3807.

### 34 *Acadiensis*

Scholar. He says the thing he knows best. . . is farming and is not affraid [sic], if he had a proper farm, of making out as well as any in the Country . . . Your son says he has no Jealousy: will be Satisfied with whatever you may be pleased to Allot to him.<sup>48</sup>

Although MacDonald conceded that Mary generally held the tenants' respect, he viewed her as lax, deceitful and irresponsible. Yet during his 1795 travels, he had avoided meeting Mary, and thus knew of her personal life only through gossip and the probably biased observations of her son. Indeed, his apprehension over the possibility of a law suit against DesBarres suggests that MacDonald may have feared that Mary's case would be valid, although he commented to his employer that

Let her Say what she may she has not to say but she has been entertained in affluence — above I may say the best in the Province. . . .[Her] infamous Conduct. . . is unpardonable in her Considering her having been so entertained and having Such fine Children under her protection, however you may have otherwise been engaged. She has not to say with Truth that she has been Cast off at all, which I must presume you would not have done without a Competent provision, unless she can so call your putting your affairs into other hands when you could get no sort of Information from her respecting them for years.<sup>49</sup>

One suspects that, competent as MacDonald may have been in assessing property management, he was too eager to please both his employer and his own outraged sense of morality, at the expense of objectivity and truth. Through all this, Mary remained calm. In September 1795, she wrote politely to MacDonald, regretting their failure to meet, and outlining to him the current state of the properties. Although DesBarres had written neither her nor her children since 1792, she continued to hope that "the Governor will think of some settlement for the family and a recompense for me, my time of thirty-one years hard service".<sup>50</sup> Probably she understood full well that there was now neither future nor financial security with DesBarres. If she was involved in a flagrant affair, it was no doubt because she was no longer young, and the stigma of her earlier relationship would have excluded her from mixing in genteel society.

DesBarres' reaction to MacDonald's report was typical. He remained in England, virtually ignoring his colonial properties, and made no provisions whatever for his children, or for their mother. According to MacDonald,

48 MacDonald to DesBarres, 15 November 1795, *ibid.*, pp. 3922-3.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 3920-1.

50 Cannon to MacDonald, 2 September 1795, *ibid.*, vol. 18, pp. 3420-1.

DesBarres did not even acknowledge receipt of the report.<sup>51</sup> He did, however, end the system by which Mary was permitted to support her family with the meagre profits realized from the various estates; she was reduced to subsistence farming at Castle Frederick, and the family was left in dire straits. In April 1796, she begged DesBarres to cease disputing her last remaining debt from his Cape Breton days, so that her credit could be restored. She had been told that DesBarres did not intend "that we should be distressed. . . . Yet that does not prevent the mischief".<sup>52</sup> Although her past services were held in low regard, DesBarres still expected time and effort from her. His new advisors had requested her to provide various legal documents and complicated data needed in the settlement of certain property suits. She could not avoid a trace of bitterness in her reply:

I am, and ever shall be, willing to attend your concerns where it may be of utility to you. . . .as far as is in my power. Although I think my treatment but indifferent nor did I expect to be called upon for any further business of yours. . . .Were I so inclined, many persons of credit in this country who are well acquainted with my fidelity the troubles, expences [*sic*], fatigue, misery in different shapes, I have sustained during such a [multitude] of years, with your concerns in Nova Scotia would aid and abet me in recovering a reward for my trouble from the estates. But I am relying on your justice, promises, honour as a gentleman that when these tedious government matters are settled you will in the first place make due arrangement of settlement for the children.<sup>53</sup>

For the next decade, Mary remained at Castle Frederick, but nothing further is known of her presumed liaison with the Irish labourer. Although four of her children lived elsewhere, relations among the various households were amicable. In 1797, DesBarres wrote his daughter Amelia that, until his return to Nova Scotia, she and her brother William were to continue rent collection. The funds were to be forwarded, with regular reports concerning the estates, to Captain MacDonald, who was residing in Prince Edward Island. In return, MacDonald would provide sufficiently for their needs from the profits. In 1798, anticipating a lengthy absence from North America, MacDonald granted Amelia and William full power of attorney, authorizing them to forward all collected rent, as well as bi-annual property reports, directly to DesBarres. They were permitted to hold back enough money to support themselves and their sisters. When William DesBarres died at Minudie in 1800, the burden of responsibility for pro-

51 Power of Attorney, MacDonald to Amelia and William DesBarres, Registry of Deeds, vol. D, p. 39, Cumberland County.

52 Cannon to DesBarres, 12 April 1796, DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, p. 3423.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 3422-4.

perty management fell on Amelia DesBarres who, like her mother before her, approached the duties with determination, diligence and concern.

DesBarres' colonial holdings were by this time in disarray. The tenants everywhere were seeking to avoid the payment of rent. The Memramcook-Petitcodiac property was considered to be in escheat, since the Skene and Goreham purchases had never been satisfactorily settled. The farmers there were trying to obtain their own grants, incited by some of the more powerful tenants, including Captain John Downing, who had previously been a local agent for Mary Cannon. At Memramcook, the farmers had had three masses said for the success of their legal ventures. During the summer of 1802, Amelia arrived there and announced, via the priest, that all back rents were due by 1 October, and that payment was acceptable only in money, rather than in cattle or produce. She backed up these threats by journeying to Fredericton, where she prosecuted the dilatory tenants in a court case which was decided in favour of her father. The judgment also recommended a confirmatory grant for the disputed holdings, and in August she wrote DesBarres that she hoped to remit over six years' back rent from his New Brunswick properties. The physical distances between the estates were still great, making regular inspections and collections a formidable challenge. But Amelia was not daunted; in 1802 she noted that

I went all the way to St. John by land & from there to Frederickton [*sic*] in a boat. Frederickton is ninety miles up the river. It was a very fatiguing jaunt thro' the woods from Cumberland to St. John. I believe I was the second woman who ever attempted to go that way.<sup>54</sup>

The principal difficulty which Amelia faced was DesBarres' continued disregard for his colonial properties. In 1800 Amos Botsford, a New Brunswick attorney, complained that "we are labouring for a Gentleman who seems to pay no attention to his own business — and taking a great deal of trouble labouring in vain and spending our strength for nought and without encouragement to go on with spirit. . . — and why shall we take so much trouble for one who does not take a step to help himself!"<sup>55</sup> Although Amelia apparently received a letter from DesBarres in 1799, thereafter, only silence followed her repeated correspondence. Nevertheless, Amelia remained firmly attached to her "always affectionately remembered & steadily loved" father: "tho' many (I may say unhappy) years have pass'd a way since we parted I feel no difference & one of my first wishes has been ever since to see you again. . . . I cannot do as well as a

54 Amelia DesBarres to DesBarres, 1 August 1802, DesBarres Papers, vol. 19, pp. 3814-9. Her attorney, Amos Botsford, warned her that to travel the distance by land would kill her; he ultimately accompanied her, still skeptical: "He said I never would be able to stand such a journey. . . the hopes of success [in Fredericton] would support me I said".

55 Botsford to Amelia DesBarres, 15 August 1800, *ibid.*, p. 3705.

Capable man faithfully attached to your interest. . .but it would be difficult to find such a one which you could intirely [*sic*] trust".<sup>56</sup> DesBarres finally wrote in late 1803, giving details of his New Brunswick property acquisitions, so that Amelia might attempt some legal settlement concerning them. He was gearing up for a final attempt to play the colonial landlord.

In 1805, DesBarres returned to North America, this time as governor of Prince Edward Island. Before long, he was subjecting his near-by properties to close scrutiny and he did not like what he saw. Although Amelia had been successful in preventing escheat of the New Brunswick holdings and in collecting a certain amount of rent money, in 1805 she was replaced as agent by Dr. James Chalmers, husband of DesBarres' daughter Martha.<sup>57</sup> Chalmers immediately began a thorough examination of his father-in-law's colonial properties. He apparently used a heavy hand in dealing with the tenants and general unrest ensued on the various estates, with some occupants even selling their leases and vacating their farms. The situation became so tense that in July 1806, Mary Cannon appealed to DesBarres to settle peacefully with his tenants:

It is with regret I see such a number of people made so very uneasy with [Chalmers'] mode of treatment, and the familys [*sic*] destitute of their support through the means of his malice. . . .I have visited the tenants of Minudie. . .requesting them to keep content. . .[and] to wait your leisure of coming to Cumberland. . . .With respect to me the thread of life is only brittle at best and neither you nor I may long be permitted to settle our long standing affairs. I have had a hard life and would wish peace on just terms for what remains. Should my freedom offend excuse this as it shall be my last.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps it was this final presumption to interfere with his long-ruined affairs which tipped the scales completely against Mary in DesBarres' still agile mind. In 1809, he filed a bill of complaint against her in Chancery court at Halifax.

The general tenor of DesBarres' complaint was that because Mary Cannon had repeatedly failed to advise him of leases which she had arranged, he had lost his most valuable tracts of land to tenants who paid little or nothing for their occupancy. The example he cited was the 999-year lease of 1280 acres of the best Tatamagouche land, granted by Mary in 1787 for £15 p.a. to the sub-agent Wellwood Waugh. DesBarres also contended that Waugh had made several similar leases without permission and that, by their actions Mary Cannon and Waugh had "fraudulently and corruptly betrayed the trust and confidence. . .

56 Amelia DesBarres to DesBarres, 28 July 1799, 18 August 1802, *ibid.*, pp. 3805, 3820.

57 Registry of Deeds, vol. F, p. 110, Cumberland County. This daughter Martha was a child by Martha Williams, although Mary Cannon also had a daughter named Martha Sophia.

58 Cannon to DesBarres, 24 July 1806, DesBarres Papers, vol. 18, pp. 3750-1.



reposed in them”.<sup>59</sup> The legal point in question centred on Mary’s authority to make leases, and the subsequent validity of any leases she had so contracted. The power of attorney drawn up by DesBarres in 1776 stated that she had “full Power and Authority [to] act, transact and perform all and everything whatever relative to [DesBarres’] Concerns, Properties and Estates” in Nova Scotia,<sup>60</sup> but DesBarres argued that he “had no conception that he thereby gave the said Mary Cannon any power or authority whatsoever to alienate or dispose of his real estates. . . or to make any leases thereof save such as [he] should from time to time approve of and specially instruct and authorize her to make”.<sup>61</sup>

In her answer to DesBarres’ bill of complaint, Mary gave as evidence his personal instructions to her in 1774, authorizing her to arrange leases, but reserving official sanction for himself. She testified that between 1774 and 1784, she had arranged over 100 leases, all of which DesBarres had approved. Wellwood Waugh had been engaged by Mary to take over the manor farm at Tatamagouche in 1781 after two earlier tenants had left before the expiration of their leases. When Samuel Sparrow sued DesBarres in 1787, Waugh had surrendered to Mary all the livestock on the Tatamagouche estate to enable her to pay the debt. In repayment to Waugh, and also because she was “solicitous and anxious for the said Wellwood to receive it thinking it at the Time much to the Advantage of the Complainant [DesBarres] and his affairs at Tatamagouche. . . to induce said Wellwood to remain”, Mary had arranged the disputed lease in 1787. She argued that the lease was both “fair value and reasonable Compensation”, in line with other agreements drawn up by her, and that DesBarres had unhesitatingly received the annual rent from Waugh’s farm until around 1806, when the dispute began. Presumably basing her case on the 1776 power of attorney, Mary contended that “she was not bound by any Letter of Instructions or other ways to submit to the Complainant for his Consideration every or any proposal which might. . . be made respecting the Settlement of his Estates”. She also re-iterated that all DesBarres’ colonial holdings would have been lost “had it not been for Defendant’s unremitted exertions in leasing and settling the same and collecting of Rents arising therefrom and of other sums of money to defend such suits as were from Time to Time brought against Complainant”.<sup>62</sup>

The problem was that after 1786, DesBarres had ignored his colonial holdings, apparently refusing either to approve leases, or to issue new instructions. Mary and her sub-agents were forced to run the properties to the best of their

59 Bill of complaint, RG36, case 179, PANS.

60 Registry of Deeds, vol. C, p. 341, Cumberland County.

61 Bill of complaint, RG36, case 179, PANS.

62 Testimony of Mary Cannon, *ibid.* There seems no question concerning the veracity of her statements. Although the disputed lease to Waugh did amount to outright ownership, she badly needed to keep the competent agent at Tatamagouche and she knew that DesBarres would be satisfied as long as a token annual rent was received from the manor farm.

abilities. Low rents were necessary to attract potential settlers, who would refuse to remain unless their leases were registered. Mary had little alternative but to finalize the leases on her own authority, or lose the properties through escheat or legal judgments. Waugh was in a position similar to Mary's. He had been granted a power of attorney by DesBarres in 1785, and although he was not given final authority over leases, DesBarres' failure to communicate with him led him to the same desperate measures. The Chancery court was in a quandary. If, as DesBarres contended, the 1776 power of attorney was not sufficient to permit lease finalization, what was the legal status of all the Cannon leases registered between 1776 and 1795? If the tenants had paid rents on these leases, did that make the agreements fully valid, regardless of Mary's presumed lack of authority? If the leases were interpreted as illegal, where did that leave tenants who had occupied and paid rent for some thirty years? Who was then financially responsible for property and agricultural improvements on the leased land? And perhaps most telling of all, if DesBarres had accepted the rents all those years, did that not indicate that he had accepted the validity and strength of the leases made by his agent?<sup>63</sup>

The case dragged on interminably. In 1813, DesBarres declared that the defendants' testimony was "uncertain [,] untrue and insufficient".<sup>64</sup> Proceedings were renewed in 1814, then ceased until 1823. When DesBarres died in 1824, the case was presumably closed without a rendered decision. The court's failure to issue a judgment suggests that there were grave legal doubts concerning DesBarres' claims and his failure to prosecute to a conclusion suggests that he, too, grudgingly conceded the futility of his complaint.

During the litigation, Mary and her children were left in a difficult and embarrassing position. In DesBarres' 1805 will, he had remembered Amelia and her two sisters at Horton, leaving them \$600 annually, to be taken from the profits of Castle Frederick.<sup>65</sup> The 1818 will did not even mention them. In recompense, and with what he probably considered vindictive justice, he deeded the four daughters his remaining rights in the Falmouth property in 1819.<sup>66</sup> There is no indication that he ever saw or contacted his daughters again, although he lived in Nova Scotia from 1812 until his death. In 1820, Mary was reduced to making a last desperate request for assistance, but she found DesBarres "like

63 Amos Botsford to James Lutterell DesBarres, 8 December 1808, DesBarres Papers, vol. 19, p. 3722. Given DesBarres' temperament and the attitude of those closest to him in later life, particularly James Lutterell, it is possible that correspondence and documents partial to Mary were removed from the property records during the Chancery dispute. DesBarres to Cannon, 20 March 1775, DesBarres Papers, MG1, vol. 1183, PANS, cites two early letters from her which are not in the collection and there are now only 17 letters from her between 1779 and 1806.

64 Replication, RG36, case 179, PANS.

65 DesBarres Papers, vol. 25, p. 6074ff.

66 Registry of Deeds, vol. 13, p. 114, Hants County. Presumably the remainder of the estate was the 2750 acres deeded Mary in 1782.

Pharoah of old, hardened to every request. . .so. . .other means must be tried [sic]”.<sup>67</sup> Presumably she had in mind a revival of her old tally against him, but too many years had elapsed, and she was too poor to risk a lengthy legal confrontation. With DesBarres’ death in 1824, she and her family learned the grim and final fact of their total exclusion from his estate.

Mary Cannon died at Castle Frederick on 7 October 1827. She bequeathed the Falmouth property to her surviving children and grandson, although only part of the estate was legally hers; the remainder had been DesBarres’, until he deeded it to the daughters in 1819.<sup>68</sup> Her estate was settled with difficulty. Her grandson, William Frederick DesBarres, refused to serve as executor, although he was by that time a lawyer. The daughters were reluctant to act, presumably because the estate lacked funds, but by 1829 the courts had pushed them into probate procedure. The estate was valued at only £121, and comprised mainly farm and kitchen implements, plus a Bible. Between 1827 and 1831, the estate incurred debts of £802, and the creditors were probably never satisfied.<sup>69</sup> The daughters had a difficult time surviving. In 1828, Amelia was in the poorhouse at Windsor, presumably a prisoner for debt; she requested a £100 loan from the lieutenant-governor, but received only £5 for her lengthy letter.<sup>70</sup> Accumulated debts forced the repeated mortgaging of Castle Frederick and in 1844-1845, William Frederick DesBarres purchased the outstanding mortgages and took over the property for himself.<sup>71</sup> Spry Ann died at Castle Frederick in August 1842.<sup>72</sup> The fate of her sisters remains unknown, although it has been rumoured that Amelia, and possibly Martha Sophia, died sometime before 1861, in either the Windsor or Horton poorhouse.<sup>73</sup>

As a property manager, Mary Cannon was undoubtedly a failure. In colonial British North America many women ran large farms or plantations; Captain John MacDonald’s sister Nelly managed his Prince Edward Island estate at

67 Cannon to S.G.W. Archibald, 24 March 1820, Archibald Papers, MG1, vol. 89, no. 286, PANS.

68 Will book 2, pp. 58-9, Probate Court, Hants County.

69 Estate Papers, *ibid.*

70 Amelia DesBarres to Sir James Kempt, 30 July 1828, S.B. Robie Papers, MG1, vol. 793, nos. 96-7, PANS.

71 Registry of Deeds, vol. 16, p. 53; vol. 17, p. 135; vol. 23, pp. 406-8; vol. 24, p. 298; and vol. 26, pp. 147-8; vol. 27, pp. 462, 469; vol. 29, p. 139, Hants County. In 1844, the sisters had mortgaged Castle Frederick to their nephew for some £750, perhaps to enable them to make some restitution of their debts (*ibid.*, vol. 27, pp. 466-7). In 1846, Martha Sophia and Mary DesBarres sold their rights to the property to their nephew for £100, describing themselves as tenants-in-common with him (*ibid.*, vol. 29, p. 145); no mention was made of Amelia.

72 *Acadian Recorder*, 26 November 1842.

73 Administration granted to Harry King, Windsor in re estates of Amelia and Martha DesBarres, late of Windsor, Hants County; administration presumably registered in New Brunswick, 10 August 1861, to permit sale of property to discharge debts. Probate Court, vol. 2, pp. 186-90, Westmorland County, N.B.

Tracadie during the 1780s, handling 90 head of cattle and a roster of tenants with fair success.<sup>74</sup> Mary Cannon, however, was in charge of not one farm, but a portfolio of properties, encompassing 80,000 acres in four widely separated areas, at a time when communication and transportation among them were extremely difficult. Her problems were compounded by the peculiarity of her relationship with DesBarres. Other women who handled family estates were wives, mothers or sisters, respected by their tenants and business associates. Mary was a mistress metamorphosed into a manager. She had to fight for acceptance in a society prejudiced against such relationships, and she had to gain the respect of DesBarres' tenants, from whose social level she had barely risen. Both MacDonald's assessment of her morality and her subsequent notoriety in Nova Scotian history are reflections of these sexist attitudes: a loyal and obedient mistress could be tolerated, but an ungrateful one could not. Other women managing family properties were also actively reassured by their absent menfolk. Although DesBarres initially provided copious advice and encouragement, his subsequent perversity in failing to assist Mary, and his later rancour against her, meant that as a female property manager, she was unusual for her time.

More than anything else, the vagaries of colonial agriculture dictated Mary's failure. The Atlantic colonies were neither the deep South nor medieval Europe. The undependable climate, the scarcity of hard cash and the reliance upon livestock raising instead of crop diversification led to the failure of many similar agrarian experiments. The emphasis upon liberal individualism and the abundance of freehold land also created a moral climate unfavourable to the feudal aspirations of landlords like DesBarres. Moreover, the colonial governments were noticeably perverse in dealing with landlords; MacDonald's own experience with quit rents on Prince Edward Island and Mary's difficulties in settling the Tatamagouche suits clearly reflect this bureaucratic self-serving. DesBarres' aspirations were unreasonable and the problem was compounded by his indifference. During his long tenure in England, he lost all contact with agricultural and settlement conditions in the colonies and no manager, male or female, ever satisfied his expectations.<sup>75</sup>

Mary was not totally blameless. It is reasonable to assume that after 1764 she was motivated by a desire to escape from poverty and a chance for self-improvement, rather than by romantic loyalty. The departure of DesBarres and the encumbrance of a family only strengthened the need for financial security, and

74 See J.M. Bumsted, "Captain John MacDonald and the Island", *The Island Magazine*, 6 (1979), p. 17.

75 Sir Alexander Cochrane, another absentee landlord, spent £10,000 between 1814 and 1827 on promoting his 1000-acre estate near Fort Ellis, but nearly lost the land through escheat for insufficient development and derived little advantage from it. See RG1, vol. 234, no. 43 and Marjory Whitelaw, ed., *The Dalhousie Journals* (Ottawa, 1978), pp. 60-1.

her interest in the properties was probably sustained only by this need to survive, and by DesBarres' repeated promises of providing for their children. She was naive in her dealings with many associates and after 1790 she was noticeably lax in prosecuting her duties.<sup>76</sup> Her affair with the unknown Irishman was a serious tactical error in preserving her tenuous position and was the pivotal point in her ultimate fall from favour. Nevertheless, there is no concrete evidence that she ever attempted to aggrandize the properties for herself, and even if her work was motivated by self-interest, it was tempered by diligence, determination and ability.<sup>77</sup>

Mary Cannon's great achievement was the survival of DesBarres' colonial properties, virtually intact although financially crippled. Had it not been for her efforts in estate management and debt payment, the lands would have been lost to escheat or to creditors. She reaped bitter rewards for her hard work, but there was a measure of justice in the fact that DesBarres' heirs, succeeding to his vast colonial properties, soon squabbled away a legacy they could neither comprehend nor control.

76 Her initial confidence in Sparrow is a good example. Amelia DesBarres to DesBarres, 18 August 1802, DesBarres Papers, vol. 19, p. 3814, also notes that Mary was deceived by the sub-agent at Memramcook-Petitcodiac, Mr. Downing, for years.

77 Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven, 1977) provides an interesting backdrop of the changing concepts of womanhood during this period, against which to compare Mary.