AN EXPLORATION OF THE NOVEMBER FIFTH BONFIRE CELEBRATION IN BRIGUS, NEWFOUNDLAND

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE NOVEMBER FIFTH BONFIRE CELEBRATION IN BRIGUS, NEWFOUNDLAND

by

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the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

In many parts of Newfoundland the November fifth Bonfire Night is still a strong and vital tradition. This study focuses on one particular community's enactment of the occasion. In Brigus, Conception Bay, the bonfire celebration has maintained its popularity up to the present day, in spite of the fact that other social occasions of the community have been altered by "modernization."

The Brigus celebration can be divided into two distinct types of bonfire events, familial and neighbourhood-groups of adolescents. Each of these share common characteristics which include physio-spatial location of the fire, socio-spatial location of the fire, participation, means of collecting materials, and representation of everyday norms and ideals. Though all of these involve a degree of movement, the manner in which movement is expressed in the characteristics of each of the respective events is quite different. In the family events the movement is inward-directed and expressive of the maintenance of family unity, while the neighbourhood-group events are outward-directed and are representative of a more extended exploration of the surrounding natural and social environment. These two different types of movement, in turn, display and express attitudes and meanings that exist outside of

the celebratory context. In effect, the celebration can be looked at as a stylized rendition of idealized norms concerning two different stages of childhood in Brigus, early childhood and adolescence.

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED

TO JOHN

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Thanks are due to many individuals and groups of people who assisted me in different ways in the preparation of this research project. Certain departments of Memorial University deserve thanks for various kinds of support that were given to me throughout my studies in Newfoundland. I am grateful to the School of Graduate Studies for providing me with funds for the duration of my education and research. Bill Wheeler, Ben Hansen, and crew at ETV Photography took much time and care in developing and enlarging the numerous cartridges of film I continually dropped off for them during my fieldwork seasons. The quality of their work was excellent. Charlie Conway from the Geography Department deserves much praise for his endless patience and many hours freely spent overseeing my development as an amateur cartographer.

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My heartfelt appreciation goes to those who unfailingly "knew" I could do it. This includes my parents, Susan, Sally, David, Robert, John, Gram, Elizabeth Simon, and Raynor and John Buckley.

My deepest thanks are to the community of Brigus that it has been my privilege to know. Though everyone was exceedingly helpful and hospitable to "the young maid down from California," there are certain people in particular who deserve special acknowledgement. I thank Rupert

Bartlett for his highly civilized "tea parties" and delicious "home-made" cookies. These visits offered me short respites from the role of folklorist while in the community; and the Wilkinson family for their warm hospitality and the full use of an empty house during the crucial stages of my work, providing me with a secluded and private space in which to think and write.

I owe the genesis of the thesis to Tom and Daisy Roberts of Brigus. But I also owe them much more, for they graciously took me into their home and their lives, and opened for me the nuances of their culture.

Hopelessly understating it, the children of Brigus willingly and exuberantly shared their "sensical" and "nonsensical" worlds with me and, in essence, they provided me with my topic. They also included me in an experience I will never forget.

Lastly, this manuscript is dedicated to my dear brother, whose unyielding courage has imprinted itself upon me as an endless source of strength. It is from this reservoir that I continually drew during the more trying stages of my thesis. Though thousands of miles separated us, his spirit and vitality in the treatment of his own concerns saw me through mine. Thank you for the inspiration John.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study developed out of a fieldwork project that was done in the fall of 1977. My initial interest in the subject was the result of a chance encounter during a fieldtrip for a folklife course I was enrolled in at the time. A group of approximately fifteen students and their professor took an excursion to Brigus, Conception Bay to view the traditional architecture of the community.

Our guide for the outing was a local man named Tom Roberts who had been born in Brigus and lived there all of his life except for short working stints on the mainland "when times got bad." During our stroll around the village, I found myself continually asking Tom about the culture of the area. As I had only been in Newfoundland for a little over a month, and this was my first exodus from "town,"[1] I plagued Tom with questions concerning the traditional lifestyle in the outports. Being a talker in his own right, he was quite pleased to discuss the area, and did so at great length.

[1] "Town" is the name used by people on the eastern part of the island when referring to the provincial capital of St. John's.

As we were walking along the path out toward the "Battery" to view the only remaining house in that now extinct neighbourhood, Tom and I passed over a blackened patch of ground, which he explained were the charred remains from the bonfire. Because of his heavy Newfoundland dialect, which was as yet still unfamiliar to my ears, and because I had already caught on to the fact that he was a bit of a practical joker, I wasn't quite sure that I had heard him correctly or that what I thought I heard should be taken seriously. So, I asked him what he meant by "the bonfires." "Oh my," he declared "from the Bonfire Night, see, the November fifth Bonfire Night." Realizing from my perplexed expression that I had never heard of such an event he proceeded to go into great detail concerning the celebration. Pointing up toward Bunker's Hill, as we passed below and to the left of it on our way to the Battery, he explained that on November fifth of this year it was guaranteed that there would be a huge bonfire there. He further explained that the spot we had just traversed was the place where the children usually have a small signal fire to light their way up to the big one at the top of the hill.

As our conversation continued, I became intrigued with the custom, and made a mental note to inquire further into it when time permitted. Though the subject never came up again on that particular day, the opportunity to pursue my interest in the topic was not long in coming. With a

course assignment the next day to do a fieldwork project, I returned to Brigus the following week to talk with Tom at greater length about the Brigus bonfire celebration. He was "a ready hand" at educating me thoroughly on the topic, telling me many personal experience narratives concerning his own previous involvement in the event, as well as taking me around the community, pointing out the various spots where the "big bonfires" normally burned. This was the first of three visits which I made to Brigus that fall that were directly related to the bonfire celebration project, and the first of several to visit with Tom Roberts to learn, through many conversations with him, the nuances of his community's social dynamics.

Initially, I thought that I would write an ethnography of the contemporary celebration. But during this time, I was learning about various kinds of field techniques in one of my courses. One of those described was the use of a videotape camera. Because of my keen interest in photography and my growing one in other forms of visual documentation, this newly-introduced medium was fascinating to me, particularly because I saw its potential to capture rapid sequences of movement; whereas the 35 mm camera was obviously more limited in this capacity. Talking about the use of video with a fellow student outside of class that same day, and discussing the fact that we would both like to experiment with it, the two of us decided to collaborate and film the November fifth Brigus Bonfire Night.

Thus began my deep involvement in the bonfire tradition in Newfoundland. The results of the 1977 endeavour included a one and a half hour black and white video documentation of the November fifth Brigus preparations and bonfire burning event; and a term paper which included a short introduction to fire festivals historically, a description of the November fifth Newfoundland event (with most of the details drawn from the Brigus celebration), and a brief symbolic analysis in which I discussed it as a period of "betwixt and between" for the adolescents involved.

In spite of the fact that the tapes were never edited, I did feel that something should be done with them because they were a valuable piece of documentation. This concern, together with the experience of being out in Brigus and witnessing the vitality of the celebration and all that it involved, made me decide that I wanted to videotape the celebration again.

I was struck during the short time that we were in Brigus, by the warmth and friendliness of the people, and even more by the apparent spontaneity of the children in front of the camera. I felt that with this experience behind me, a second time around I could do a more professional job and end up with an edited documentation of the celebration, presentable for public viewing.

Discovering that Canada's National Museum of Man gave out yearly research grants, I sent in a proposal in the summer of 1979 to do a videotape documentation of the

bonfire celebration. I was informed in the spring of 1980 that I had received the grant for the project. During this time, in the midst of searching for a thesis topic, I decided that this would be ideal. So I combined the two projects.

My main concern, both for the grant and my thesis research, was to document the celebration as completely as possible, both visually and orally, in an attempt to capture its integrity. Because of the spontaneous nature of the celebration, which occurs only once a year, and the tremendous amount of movement throughout, I decided to limit my personal fieldwork to one specific community. My visual orientation to the celebration, together with other considerations (which included the fact that my previous fieldwork in Brigus had laid a solid foundation for future work), dictated the slant that my thesis took.

Due to the fieldwork done in the fall of 1977 on Bonfire Night, and additional fieldwork done in the spring and summer of 1979 in relation to recording Tom Roberts' personal life history, I felt that I had a good rapport with a large number of the young people and with certain adults in the community. As well as being familiar with community members, I was also beginning to know the townscape. Finally, I had witnessed the celebration in Brigus once before, and thus had a general idea of how, where, and when the associated activities were enacted. All of these "familiarities," I felt were valuable assets to weigh

when determining how and where to go about doing a thorough documentation; and of course, all of them pointed toward Brigus as a favourable place of research.

As I began to formulate my methodology I decided that I would do so through a combination of field and archive research using both contemporary and historical sources. Because it was already mid-September by the time I began to organize the research, and knowing from previous experience that preparations for the event would soon begin, I chose to concentrate on the fieldwork aspect of the study first.

My initial steps included arrangements for the use of a porta-pak video machine from Educational Television at Memorial University of Newfoundland.[2] Once I had an agreement with ETV regarding the use of their equipment, I made a visit out to Brigus, my first in a year and a half due to the fact that I had been out of the country during the interval. This visit was essentially a social one in which I became reacquainted with people I had previously known in the community. This provided me with a number of contacts for the fieldwork soon to ensue. The visit proved to be additionally fruitful regarding my research, as I was continually recognized in the lanes by the children of the community. Some of them greeted me with "You're the bonfire lady," and "Say, you gonna see the fires this year?"

[2] Hereafter referred to as ETV and MUN respectively.

These inquiries gave me the perfect opportunity to communicate my project to them, and that I would be in Brigus periodically for the next two months. There were a number of children I saw during that visit whom I recognized from having taken part in the 1977 bonfire celebration. In particular, there was a young fellow named Rodney Mercer, whom the community has dubbed "the little mayor." This nickname gradually became more clear to me as my stay in the community progressed. In the brief time spent in Brigus three years earlier for the bonfire occasion, Rodney had been very helpful, but this year he would prove indispensable. Rodney became my personal guide to the community, and escort to the celebratory activities, many of which I might otherwise have missed had he not brought their unpredictable emergence to my attention. Also, because of the nature of some of the activities, which had "subversive" undertones, Rodney's "ok" gave me an entrée into them. Even though I did not directly participate, I was allowed to accompany the boys and take all the "snaps" I wanted.

Essentially, the fieldwork involved visual, oral, and fieldnote documentation. The emphasis on visual documentation was due, in part, to the fact that I had received the National Museum grant, but there were also other reasons. My initial interest in video stemmed from its ability to capture unbroken sequences of activity. This I felt was ideal for an active tradition like the bonfire celebration.

There were, of course, certain limitations of this medium that I recognized from previous experience, as well as some that I would become aware of in the process of using the moving camera during this particular fieldwork project. First of all, ETV could only lend me the equipment and a student helper for three days. This coupled with other restricting factors which included a limited film supply, the cumbersome quality of the equipment, and the potentially disruptive effect of the presence of such equipment, influenced my decision to do the videotaping on the weekend directly before, and the day of, the bonfires. I felt this was a good compromise because those were the days that I anticipated the activity would be most visible and intense. Therefore what videofilm I had would be put to good use. The equipment would not have to be transported very often or great distances because much of the activity would be concentrated in certain places. I hoped that by that time the community, and the children in particular, would be well used to me so that the presence of the video would only minimally disrupt the natural progression of things.

I felt that, in addition to the videotaping, in order to give a true picture and capture the fleeting details of motion in the uncontrolled and shifting environment of the celebration, I should augment my documentation through the use of the still camera. Carrying a cannon F 145 and a leica M 3 as my constant companions proved invaluable on many levels throughout the duration of the study. Not only

were they used to document the celebratory activities, but also to record the overview of the community. I took several panoramic shots as well as ones of the physical landscape. These helped to capture variables such as house design, roads, yards, and others.

In addition both the cameras and the photograph-taking served as a focus of conversation which, in turn, often aided in creating a sense of rapport with community members. The photographs additionally served as a form of exchange. They also frequently initiated conversations about the subject matter contained within them.

I tried to always have one camera loaded with Tri-X ASA 400, and the other with Kodachrome ASA 64. As well as anticipating their usefulness in the eventual description and analysis of the celebration, I was also taking the photos with the intention of using them as gifts for various people in the community who had provided me with hospitality and information regarding the celebration. The photographs, I also hoped, would later be compiled for public display in the form of a photographic essay and slide presentation.

As well as the camera being instrumental in my attempt to meet more people in the community, there were other ways I made contacts. A fellow graduate student told me about an encounter he had had with the mayor of Brigus up at the Confederation building in St. John's. He had told the mayor, George Jerrett, that I was doing a study of the

bonfire tradition in Brigus and Mr. Jerrett suggested that he send me over. This visit gave me good information regarding the history of Brigus.

Rupert Bartlett, a man I had known from earlier visits to Brigus, took me around the village one day and introduced me to four households of older people. After introductions, I told them what I was there for, and asked permission to return to talk and tape record them about the bonfire celebrations at a later date. In each case, I received invitations to return for a chat and a cup of tea. Later, when I did follow up on each of these visits, with the intention of tape recording our conversations, I found that either the individual's voice was inaudible, as in the case of Mrs. Hiscock and the senior Sparks, or that the person requested not to be taped, as in the case of Rich Fowler. Though all of the visits were somewhat informative, only the one with Rich Fowler provided me with relevant information regarding the celebration. In this instance, I took fieldnotes by hand.

Initially, I had anticipated that this work would develop into a study on culture change as it is reflected in the changing bonfire traditions in Brigus. This was why I originally planned to interview several of the older members of the community as well as observe the present-day activities of the children. I had even considered interviewing with videotape, but the suggestion of this to any of the adults caused nervous laughter and made them

highly self-conscious about their concern with talking "proper English." Because it obviously proved to be disruptive, I quickly dropped the idea of filming any interviews.

During several of my conversations with people throughout the village, the name Jackie Wilkinson often came up. Hearing that she was British, and had had a Guy on the top of her bonfire the year before, I decided to search this person out. My visits with her and her family were always lively. As well as proving a ready source of information, she also had an anecdote for just about every resident in the community. In addition to telling me about Guy Fawkes day in Britain, she also described how she celebrated it here, and suggested that I go visit two other "talkative" residents. These two people proved to be wealths of information in their own right; Birdie Roberts, an elderly man of eighty-one vividly described the "old day" celebrations to me; and Dulsie Spracklin, the "local historian", gave me valuable information on the community history, as well as on Bonfire Night.

A Sony 145 was used for the duration of the fieldwork. When I went on an interview, I introduced myself, informed the person who had suggested I visit him, and described the project I was involved in. I stated that I was doing a video documentation as well as a "large paper, almost a book." I expressed interest in the custom because it was one that was not a part of my own childhood experience.

but was, in some ways, similar to the Hallowe'en tradition where I grew up. Drawing this connection helped to set a common ground and also helped to open the door to discussions concerning the more disruptive and mischievous features of the celebration, because I intimated that such things happened during Hallowe'en as well.

Aside from these formal methods of meeting the adult population, there were also informal introductions in the lanes and across backyard fences. In fact, I am sure that within a few days time everyone in the village knew all about me, why I was constantly in the company of adolescents rather than people my own age, and why I was continually adorned with two cameras round my neck. Well into October, when I would introduce myself to someone I had not formerly met, he or she would often remark "Oh yes, the California maid from university down to study our Bonfire Night."

Although it was no trouble at all becoming acquainted with the children in the community, I arranged in early October to show to the two elementary schools in Brigus portions of the unedited black and white videotape that I had taken in 1977. This, I felt, would give me the opportunity to introduce myself to a large percentage of the children that would be involved in the celebration, inform them of why I was there and ask their help and cooperation.[3]

[3] Those of high school age were bused further down the bay, so I was not able to show them the tape or pass questionnaires out to them.

Additionally, I knew the viewing would be enjoyable to them because many of them were either in it or knew those who were.

The same day that I gave the video presentations at the schools I also handed out to grades four through eight a questionnaire that I had devised entitled Bonfire Traditions in Newfoundland.[4] Knowing that Brigus was the Municipal District for several of the surrounding towns, I asked the teachers to hand out questionnaires to all of the students regardless of what community they lived in. There were two reasons for this. Those forms returned from children residing in Brigus would give me important information on the Brigus tradition and educate me on where the likely fires would be this year and who would be involved in which ones. These also would document local designations of spaces like neighbourhoods and places of bonfires, and provide me with other vital pieces of information. I distributed the questionnaire to students from nearby communities as well because I felt it would give me a greater geographical perspective of the bonfire traditions, so that I could later compare and contrast the Brigus tradition to others on the island.

Including both schools, Brigus Academy and St. Edwards, I distributed a total of 250 questionnaires, 139 of which were completed and returned to me. Sixty of these were filled out by Brigus residents. For my immediate

[4] See Appendix 1, p.

concerns, those sixty provided me with rich details regarding the Brigus tradition. With this information I was able to inquire further into specifics of the tradition. The anwsers also gave me the kind of information necessary to prepare a mental map of where the different bonfires were likely to be situated this year so that I could determine how best to document the events.

For the first three weeks of October, I spent about three days out of each week in the community, interviewing adult residents and "hanging out" with the adolescents. Around the fourth week of October the activity steadily increased, so much so that I decided to stay out in Brigus full time until the fifth of November.

During my entire stay, I acted the role of participant-observer, sometimes active and sometimes passive. I was often called over the phone, or called on in person, by the boys to notify me what was "on the go"--in effect, what preparations they were shortly to start in on.

I had attempted early in the fieldwork stages to tape record various excursions on which I accompanied the boys, but the tape recording equipment, together with the two cameras, proved awkward and also caused the boys to act in a more staged manner. The personal interaction that was required with the tape recorder, and the attention it drew from the other members of the group, made the boys self-conscious, and these scenes inevitably exploded into exaggerated play and nonsense. The cameras on the other hand,

were unobtrusive enough that eventually they were forgotten or ignored and, therefore, as a method of documentation with the children, proved much more useful.

Considering the difficulties of using the tape recorder--its cumbersomeness, its presence causing self-consciousness, or a stated objection to its use--I quickly resorted to pen and pad as the main means of recording conversations and remarks concerning the celebration. Though it was not necessarily the easiest method of notation, it was received better by all age groups, and was, I felt, less disruptive to the general flow of things.

During my stay I began to realize that I would probably have to narrow my focus within the Brigus context. This was due to the emerging nature of the celebration, which was one of perpetual motion. I found particularly that once the activities began to pick up momentum during the week previous to the fifth, with so much going on within each group of adolescents involved in a particular bonfire, I could not conceivably thoroughly document it all. I also realized at this time, from talking to various people, that there were two distinct types of bonfire events, the neighbourhood-group and the family. I therefore made the decision to focus, for the remainder of the celebration, on one particular group event and one particular family event. In fact, the choice of which ones to concentrate on was essentially already made for me. I had, without being conscious of it, been giving more

consideration to the Bunker's Hill neighbourhood-group and the Wilkinson family stages of development than to any of the others. This was due to the fact that I knew and had a good rapport with both respective clusters of people. Although the Wilkinsons are, to a degree, outsiders, their celebratory activities were similar enough to the typical family bonfire event that I felt they would be representative. Therefore, the next few days included close observation of these two specific events and sporadic observation of others that were taking place simultaneously in different parts of the community.

The adolescents had been prepared for the presence of the videotape, both because I had forewarned them and because many of them had taken part in the filming context in the fall of 1977. In most cases, those being filmed paid no attention to it at all. It was only when the equipment needed readjusting or temporarily failed that one or more of the youths asked if we needed help transporting the machinery or fixing it. These offers made me realize that the children were not oblivious to the filming and, in fact, were quite aware of it. Nonetheless, this awareness appeared to have little effect on their apparent spontaneity. Apart from the expected bad luck, with batteries running down or a leg of the tripod getting stuck at crucial filming stages, my two helpers and I recorded some excellent footage during those three days.

While the filming was going on, I also took a number of photographs and jotted notes down in my pad concerning comments made by participants and bystanders, or sequences of events going on and related features.

With the passage of both November fifth and the aftermath of the bonfire, I returned to St. John's overloaded with six fifteen-minute colour videotapes of the celebration, five used rolls of TRI-X film, ten used rolls of Kodachrome film, six sixty-minute tape-recorded interviews, several pages of hand-written notes, and 139 completed questionnaires. In addition to those questionnaires I had thirty-four awaiting me on my return to MUN.[5] In October, I had asked three professors to hand out the questionnaires to their undergraduate folklore classes. They did so, and of the one hundred distributed, thirty-four were completed and returned. These, which covered a wide geographical area and represented several regions of the island, plus the seventy-nine from neighbouring communities to Brigus, were used to supplement the existing material relating to Bonfire Night in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive.[6]

At this time, I began an investigation of archive resources to develop a better understanding of the tradition out of which the Brigus bonfire celebration developed.

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[5] See Appendix II, p. 214.

[6] Hereafter referred to as MUNFLA.

I carried this out in several ways and found numerous useful resources. As I briefly mentioned above, I utilized the MUNFLA collection, searching through both the Custom and Belief index and the Calendar Custom index. The material gathered there, coupled with my questionnaires, gave me a great deal of comparative material with which to contrast the traditions in Brigus.

In addition to consulting the MUNFLA collection, I looked through a number of other archives and collections of student papers. These included the Maritime History archive, in which I found important papers on the Brigus fishery; Tom Nemec's Anthropology collection, which housed some informative social-anthropology papers; and John Mannion's private collection, which had some descriptive papers on the historical geography of Brigus. All of these student papers aided me in either my Community Setting chapter or in the Newfoundland section of my Fire Festival chapter.

In addition to these resources, I found the Newfoundland Room in the MUN Library highly useful, especially for historical and socio-economic documentation related to Brigus. The MUN library, in general, was a ready source of information concerning cross-cultural works on fire festivals, as well as theoretical works.

In addition to piecing all of this information together, I also began to make some semblance of order out of my fieldwork material, and to bring the two techniques

together. Eventually, a scheme for the thesis began to emerge, which included a section on the community of Brigus; a historical background to the fire festival; a detailed ethnography of the 1980 Brigus celebration; and a symbolic analysis of it.

In both the community setting section and the ethnography section, I documented and consolidated some of the information into a visual format. As John Collier suggests in Visual Anthropology, I hoped that these visual aides would "vitalize the meaning of the written words."[7] I did this through the use of maps as well as photographs. Except for the first map included here, they are all original designs developed from a combination of town-planning maps I had found in the Newfoundland Confederation Building and my own observations and insights.

I initially began to formulate my ideas about the meaning of the celebration while looking through the black and white photographs I had taken, trying to decide which ones to include in a photo-essay on the bonfire celebration that was to be displayed in the MUN Arts and Administration building. As I examined them I began to recognize that I had captured something intangible in each of the photos, an impression that I could not quite articulate. While I was puzzling over this a fellow student, Penny Houlden, walked

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[7] John Collier, Jr., Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 120.

in and said she had been looking through my photographs earlier. She told me they were very good and exclaimed that I had succeeded in capturing a tremendous amount of action in the stills. She said that she thought the photos aptly conveyed the "mood" of the celebration.

With this remark, and having just run across Collier's comment, "The key to its [the photograph's] richness is in the emotional quality of the imagery,"[8] I began to scrutinize my collection more closely in an attempt to unravel its captured meaning. It suddenly occurred to me that what each photo held in common was movement: children transporting materials, travelling out to Molly's Island, chopping wood, building a Guy, sitting by a fire, cavorting around a fire, and many more. But what became more obvious was that the individual photographs, when compared with one another, suggested different kinds of movement, going in different directions. Immediately I sat down and designed two figures that eventually developed into the ones included in Chapter 5.

Working on this, I realized that there were two general kinds of movement expressed in the photos, outward-directed and inward-directed. I also noticed that each of these coincided with the two different types of events present in the celebration, the neighbourhood-group events and the family events.

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[8] Collier, Visual Anthropology, p. 75.

Puzzling over this further, in an endeavour to find a yet deeper significance, I recalled a section in Collier's book in which he discussed photography in relation to social dynamics:

> The photography of social actions leads us into a rich area of non-verbal research. A considerable variety of reliable evidence can be read from photographs of social scenes, for we find in them the complex dimensions of social structure, cultural identity, and psychological expression. Pictures of people mingling offer us opportunities for measuring, qualifying, and comparing, but these measurements can go further and help define the very shape of social structures.[9]

I realized that the movements in my photographs displayed and expressed attitudes and meanings that existed outside of the celebratory context. In effect, the celebration could be looked at as a display of idealized norms concerning two different stages of childhood in Brigus.

This study represents a combination of field and archive research, utilizing both historical and contemporary source material. These combinations permit a deeper understanding of the celebration and the context in which it is enacted.

The community as a whole is involved in the celebration on various levels, if for no other reason than because they are aware of it. The bonfire celebration is also a strong and vital tradition in Brigus. Therefore I felt

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[9]Collier, Visual Anthropology, p. 33.

that a chapter on the physical setting and socio-economic background (Chapter II) is justified, for it provides the framework from which this celebration emerges. I set another pertinent foundation for the understanding of the celebration by discussing the fire festival tradition from which Bonfire Night has developed (Chapter III). I then go on to give a detailed description of the contemporary celebration (Chapter IV). Finally, based on Roger Abrahams' theory of Enactment, I present a symbolic analysis of the celebration (Chapter V).

I realize that there are many other facets of the celebration that can be studied, as well as different approaches by which to look at those I emphasize here. My chosen focus offers insights into the integrity of the celebration, but makes no absolute statements. In this way my thesis is most truly what its title describes it to be: an exploration of the Brigus bonfire celebration.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMMUNITY SETTING

Part I: The Physical Setting

Brigus lies at the head of a narrow and deeply curved bay, within Conception Bay proper, along the base of the northern most arm of the Avalon Peninsula (Map 1). Surrounded on the north, south, and east by a band of rugged coastal hills, the settlement sits in a bowl shaped valley of rough and rocky ground. One of its residents described it to me as,

> . . . just a hollow between two hills really. Cause you get the hills on the south side and the hills on the north side, and its just a small community in the centre, set down in the valley.[1]

Three ponds are located within the community: Inner Harbour Pond, Beaver Pond, and Frog Marsh Pond (Map 2). Inner Harbour Pond, the largest of the three, serves as the mooring place for most of the fishing boats, and depending on the weather and the time of day, is dotted with anywhere from six to twenty-five dories. During the winter

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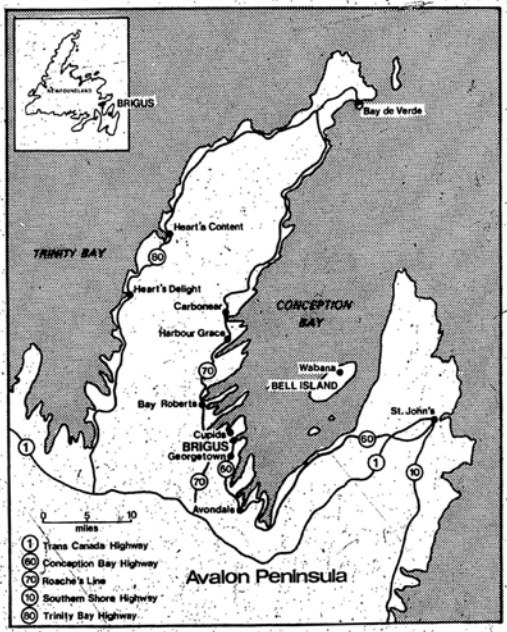
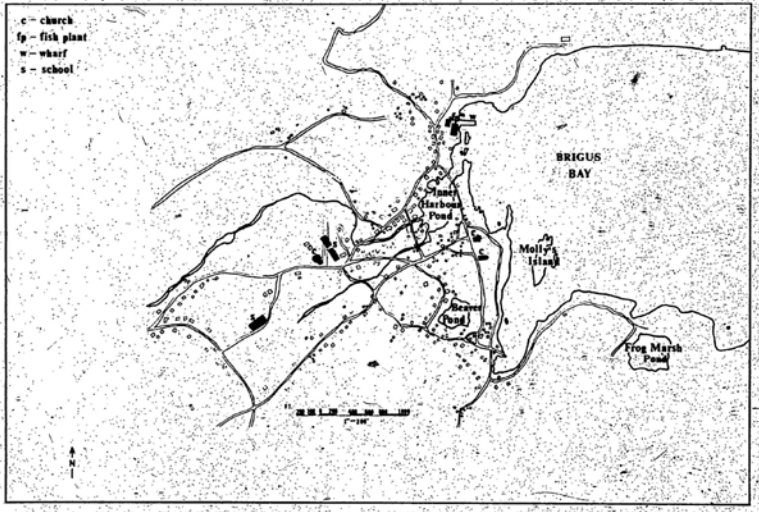
[1] I use the individual's entire name when it is known, otherwise I use only their first name. Dulsie Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

Map 1. Brigus and other Conception Bay communities.


NEWFOUNDLAND
BRIGUS
Bay de Verde
Heart's Content
TRINITY BAY
80
Heart's Delight
Carbonear
CONCEPTION BAY
Harbour Grace
70
Wabana
BELL ISLAND
Bay Roberts
St. John's
Cupids
BRIGUS
Georgetown
60
1
10
70
Avondale
0 5 10
miles
1 Trans Canada Highway
80 Conception Bay Highway
70 Roache's Line
10 Southern Shore Highway
80 Trinity Bay Highway
Avalon Peninsula

Map 2. Townscape of Brigus.


c – church
fp – fish plant
w – wharf
s – school
BRIGUS
BAY
Pond
Harbour
Pond
Molly's
Island
Beaver
Pond
Frog Marsh
Pond
N

season each of the three ponds is often the stage for a lively game of ice hockey or a more sedate ice-skating party. In the summer, each serves as a setting for that season's favourite male adolescent pastime, line-fishing. There are also two streams that traverse the town, both of which empty into Inner Harbour Pond. In the summer their rocky walls are bordered with wild spearment, the scent of which lingers about the lanes that cross over them. A small forested island, known locally as "Molly's Island," named after a young girl said to have been taken there by the fairies, is situated just off the southern portion of the waterfront, at the head of Brigus Bay.[2]

Brigus is a town of approximately nine hundred inhabitants,[3] and its nearest neighbours are Cupids, four miles to the northwest, and Georgetown, six miles to the south. Across Conception Bay, to the eastward, Bell Island can be seen "nine miles as the crow flies," so Brigus residents say. Within the last thirty years, Brigus has had two paved routes connecting it to neighbouring communities and to the provincial capital of St. John's, which is forty-five miles away. These include the old Conception Bay Highway (Highway 60); or Roaches Line (Road 70) and the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1). Aside from the occasional Sunday

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[2]Paul Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[3]Newfoundland, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Municipal Directory (St. John's: Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1980), p. 67.

afternoon driver or summer tourist the[illegible] roads bring little outside traffic into the village.

The portion of the Conception Bay highway that travels through the community at the cross-roads to the centre of town is known locally as "the main road." Except for the more recently developed area that stretches along this expanse, Brigus is circular in shape (see Map 2, p.27; Photo 1).[4] While describing it to me, George Jerrett made this observation: "Wherever you go in Brigus, its all circles, one leading into another."[5] This circularity is further emphasized by the narrow, winding streets which are closely bordered by houses. These features together with the haphazard, clustered distribution of buildings upon the land, provide Brigus with a feeling of enclosure that is unusual in Newfoundland settlements, as many tend to straggle around the bays in long chains.

The residents of the community cognitively designate certain areas of physical space into neighbourhoods, each descriptively named for its location or salient feature: South Side; Frog Marsh; Riverhead; English Town, Irish Town; Main Road; Inner Harbour Pond; Middle Ridge; Ratley Row; and the Battery (Map 3). While explaining to me why certain areas are called by these names Dulsie Spracklin told me about Ratley Row and Irish Town,

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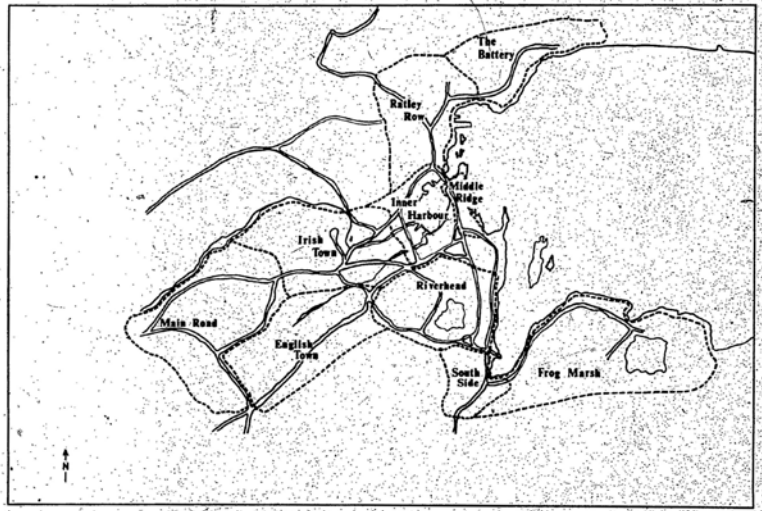
[4] Except when specifically stated otherwise, each photograph was taken in the fall of 1980.

[5] George Jerrett, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Photograph 1. Panoramic view of Brigus.

Map 3. Areas of physical space in Brigus designated cognitively as "neighbourhoods" by their residents.


The Battery
Ratley Row
Middle Ridge
Inner Harbour
Irish Town
Riverhead
Main Road
English Town
South Side
Frog Marsh
N

> Ratley Row, usually the accepted version of why it is called that, it is sort of a rockety rickety road, and you were rattling up there with a horse and cart. Now Irish Town, well I suppose that should have been named because many of the families who settled there were from Ireland.[6]

There is a noticeable difference in architectural form and settlement pattern between the old clustered central core and the newer houses along the main road (see Map 2, p. 27; Photo 1, p.31). In the more densely populated older area, because of the rugged ground, many of the houses are built on poor land, grouped close together, and have limited rearage. Most of the buildings in this area are of traditional Newfoundland design, similar to the nineteenth century New England style. They are generally two storey; the ground floor consisting of two large rooms, a hall, and stairs; the second floor of two and sometimes three bedrooms.[7] All of these homes are of wooden construction, decorated with green or black slated roofs. The majority of them are painted white, while a few are more colourful, the most popular choice being yellow. The area immediately outside the front of each home is often ornamented with an assortment of flowers and trees, particularly lilac. Behind each house is almost

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[6]Dulsie Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

[7]Gerald L. Pocius, "Calvert: A Study of Artifacts and Spatial Usage in a Newfoundland Community," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1979, p. 200.

always a small vegetable garden plot, and to the side of this, an outbuilding such as a root cellar or a barn. Framing all of these is a hand-made wooden fence, which usually zig zags around the outside of the buildings, gardens, and other accouterments that are the individual's personal property.

The newer area is much more sparsely populated and is more open. These houses are built in a ribbon development along the main road at the entrance to the town. Their design is of the contemporary CMHC bungalow style, which was introduced in Newfoundland in the mid-1960's. These are generally one storey rather than two: the two major rooms serve as parlor and kitchen, while the rest of the house is divided up into small bedrooms.[8] The houses are usually a combination of wood and brick or wood and stone. In spite of their bright colours, these houses look isolated and exposed in comparison to the close knit character of the older ones. Very few of these have any of the traditional accessories such as the garden plot and the outbuildings; they have been replaced by closely cropped grass lawns and garages built onto the houses.

There is no real commercial centre per se in Brigus. Scattered throughout the town are five small stores known as "confectionaries," a service station, a small gift shop, and a fast food fish and chips restaurant. Any time of

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[8] Gerald L. Pocius, Personal Communication, 4 August 1981.

the day and evening the confectionaries especially are scenes of human traffic congestion. During the day the women of the community, or the children sent by their mothers, are inside buying the day's groceries and "chatting up" with whoever else is there. In the evening, after hours, these places are traditionally popular "hangouts" for the adolescents. "There are certain places in Brigus where you stand up, Hiscock's store or Gerald's shop door ... these are the places for the young people."[9]

The most prominent building in the community, both because of its large size and because of the fact that it is its main industry, is Hiscock's fish plant. The plant employs a large percentage of the town's working force, housing a permanent staff of twenty men and one woman, and up to forty additional men in the summer. The only other industry is the more seasonal blueberry processing plant, which employs approximately four people during the summer months. The produce from both of these is sent to St. John's for distribution outside the province.

Other buildings in the community include three churches: a Roman Catholic; an Anglican; and a United (see Map 2, p.27 for locations). St. Mary's, the Roman Catholic church, is situated close to the entrance to the core of the community. The other two churches stand

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[9] George Jerrett, MUNFLA Tape C5026.

dramatically atop a hill overlooking the bay on one side, and the dwelling areas on the other. Some people say that they were built side by side to keep one another company while looking after their respective congregations, both at home and at sea.[10]

There are also a number of institutional buildings in Brigus. These include: The Loyal Orange Lodge; a Council Office, which serves as the district judge's office; a post office; a regional library, and a firehall.

Most of the ground in the town and its immediate surroundings is either solid rock at the surface or seasonally wet marshes. Both of these conditions are unfavourable for building and farming; so those doing either put forth a great deal of manual effort. As Birdie Roberts said, "Working this soil is back-breaking work sure."[11] Nonetheless, this natural drawback deters few, and during the warmer months particularly, one can hear the almost continual outdoor activity of hammers and hoes, and see paint being splashed on newly constructed fences or bent-over bodies tending to cabbages and carrots.

The interior of the settlement is spotted with deciduous trees of ash, willow and poplar. In the summer, these, along with high grasses sprinkled with wild flowers carpeting much of the rocky soil, create a scene of lushness and

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[10] Paul Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[11] Birdie Roberts, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

beauty. But this picturesque landscape dies hard and fast as the long winter months settle in. Then the land becomes barren, bleak and windswept.

Surrounding the village are stands of spruce and balsam firs, hardwood scrubs, and woody plants which produce berries, such as the blueberry and partridge berry. Here open space abounds, providing the children with an unlimited playground, and the community members in general with rich hunting grounds, berry fields, and ample wood supplies.

Because of its geographical location, Brigus is frequented with bouts of rain and fog throughout the year. Its two longest and most obvious seasons are winter and summer. The winter season lasts six to seven months and is cold and wet, but seldom severe. The summer season, which essentially includes spring and autumn as well, ranges from chilly to mild, but rarely hot. The popular Newfoundland proverb,"Work in summer, play in winter," attests to the dual nature of its seasonal variation. As well as expressing the climatic conditions, this proverb also suggests social and economic ones. These will be explored in the following section.

Part II: Socio-Economic Background

Documentary evidence of Brigus's long history can be found in official records such as census returns and parish registers, and in descriptive references made in diaries,

journals, and provincial history books. What can be pieced together presents an intriguing social and economic development, and one that will provide a background to the understanding of the community context in which the Bonfire Night celebration occurs.

Early Settlement

From pre-Columbian times the maritime nations of Europe sailed to Newfoundland to exploit its rich repository of marine life. Because of the technical processes involved, what developed among these nations was a migratory fishery. The ships sailed to Newfoundland in the spring of the year, prosecuted the waters during the summer months, and returned to their homelands in the fall with their catches to be put on the market. Originally fishing vessels from England, France, Portugal and Spain frequented the waters, but eventually France and England emerged as primary contenders for the Newfoundland fishery.

During the beginning of the seventeenth century, despite the British Government's lack of encouragement of permanent settlement, and repeated raids by the French, British migratory fishermen began to settle in Newfoundland on a year-round basis rather than seasonally. Many of these settlers, were West Country fishermen from the counties of Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, and Somerset.

The north-eastern portion of the Avalon Peninsula was the first area to be colonized,

> At Cupids, in a cove in one of the long, narrow minor embayments on its western shore, had been the site, in 1610, of Newfoundland's first formal and permanent plantation, that of the London and Bristol Company. By the end of the century, there were to the north and south of it, almost a dozen other foci of fishing activity.[12]

Among these was the community of Brigus. The date of its earliest settlement is uncertain but toward the end of the seventeenth century there is recorded evidence of residency in the valley along the south side of Brigus Bay (see Map 2, p. 27). Sir John Berry's list of Newfoundland planters and their concerns for 1675 contains figures for "Brigus by North" which indicate that there were three planters in residence, each in possession of two boats and a stage.[13] The census also reveals that the community was carrying on agricultural activities as well.[14]

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[12] C. Grant Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), p. 13.

[13] The term "planter" refers to a person who maintained the dual role as local merchant in the community, and as middleman between the large England-based mercantile firms and the fishermen in Newfoundland. Originally they too, did some of the fishing, but gradually they left that activity to their "servants," who were hired help.

[14] Sir John Berry, "a list of the planters names w[it]h an acco[un]t of their Concerns from Cape de Raze to Cape Bonavista, viz 1675/ Sir John Berry" (Unpublished Manuscript. Available at St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, n.d.), n. pag.

Throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, there were numerous raids by the French on several of the eastern Newfoundland communities. During one such raid, Abbé Baudois made the following entry into his diary on November 23, 1696, "We passed by Brigus, where there were about sixty men . . . including eight Irish servants whom the English treat as slaves."[15] In addition he noted that there were three fishing plantations and six thousand quintals stored in the harbour at the time. From Baudois's observation it can be noted that over a span of two decades the population of Brigus had almost doubled in size.

The French continued to menace the Newfoundland coastline in an attempt to gain supremacy over the British Empire; and in 1705 they were cited ". . . burning and destroying in like manner the harbours of Harbourmain, Breckhouse [Brigus], Portegrave, Island Cove. . . ."[16] Brigus must have been a growing village at that time because there is mention in Lench's Brigus Methodist Jubilee that on that same occasion seven houses were burned down in Frog Marsh along the south side.[17] Local tradition

[15]Excerpt from the journal of Abbé Baudois which appears in D.W. Prowse, A History of Newfoudland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records (New York: Macmillan, 1895), p. 230.

[16]Prowse, A History of Newfoundland, p. 262.

[17]Charles Lench, A Souvenir of the Brigus Methodist Jubilee of the Opening of the Church 1875-1925 (Unpublished

states that the Brigus planters, anticipating such attacks ". . . had shrewdly built their houses among the woods, but the barking of a dog brought them [the French] back and they burned down the whole place."[18] French harassment eventually came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. This acknowledged English sovereignty over Newfoundland, and so France withdrew her claims.

By the mid-eighteenth century Brigus was established as a base for a number of large English merchant concerns, including that of Kemp and Company. "In the late 18th century and early 19th century, merchants based in Poole, among other places, maintained trading establishments in . . . Brigus."[19] There are no individual census records for Brigus until 1836, but it can be assumed that if large mercantile concerns were setting up branches there, its population must have been increasing at a steady rate to warrant the trade, and that it must have been relatively stable economically as well. There is evidence that side by side with these large concerns during this period, there were also small independent merchants in Brigus, among them

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Manuscript. Available at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, n.d.), p. 14.

[18]Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[19]W. Gordon Hancock, "English Migration in Newfoundland," The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography, Social and Economic Papers, No. 8, ed. John J. Mannion (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977), p. 32.

men from the Channel Islands and the West Country.[20]

Prosperity: Nineteenth Century Brigus

With the recovery of the European market in the nineteenth century there was a great demand for fish. As the Newfoundland fishery expanded to meet this demand, the population also grew. Between 1811 and 1830 many Irish emigrated to Newfoundland because of political unrest in their homeland. It was during this time that the neighbourhood in Brigus known as "Irish Town" began to be settled (for location see Map 3, p.33). This huge Irish-Catholic influx created tension on the English-Protestant island due to divergent religious beliefs, cultural differences, and economic competition.[21] Continued clashes between these two groups led in 1856 to the development of an educational system based on denominational lines.[22] Though there is evidence of clashes and animosity between the Irish and English for other communities in the vicinity, there is no such evidence for Brigus.

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[20]For a more detailed account of these independent merchants see David Leamon, "Brigus" (Unpublished Manuscript. Available at St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Maritime History Group, B 28, n.d.).

[21]G.M. Story, "Newfoundland: Fishermen, Hunters, Planters, and Merchants," in Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, ed. Herbert Halpert and G.M. Story (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 26.

[22]Story, p. 27.

The village continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century, and by 1836 the population had risen to 1,318 with 223 dwelling houses, 81 fishing boats and 182 servants.[23] By 1874 Brigus had reached its peak in population density with 1,975 residents, including professionals, planters and fishermen, tradesmen, and farmers; there were also one mill and one factory in existence at this time.[24]

During this century, Conception Bay became the centre for the sealing industry and the migratory codfishery off the Labrador coast. Brigus enjoyed a large share of this prosperity. Apart from St. John's, it was the main port for the two fisheries during the decades between the 1830's and the 1880's, "Yes b'y," said Tom Roberts, "in those days there were schooners enough to fill the whole place, one to the next, so's you could walk across the decks from one end of the harbour to the other."[25]

The cod fishery at this time was being encouraged by the British, and this gave the communities in general both the incentive to expand and a viable market for their product. Brigus specifically enjoyed much of the

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[23]Newfoundland, Colonial Secretary's Office, Population Returns, 1836 (St. John's: n.p., 1836), n. pag.

[24]Newfoundland, Colonial Secretary's Office, Abstract Census and Return of Population of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1874 (St. John's: J.W. Withers, Queen's Printer, 1876), pp. 32-36.

[25]Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

prosperity.[26] This was due to two factors: with a deep and protected harbour, Brigus attracted many captains, to use the wharves as a home base, and the emergence of dependable, adventuresome men such as William Munden, John Norman, and Abram and William Bartlett, who encouraged the development of large scale fishing operations at a time when the Brigus fishermen were concentrating on the inshore fishery.[27] In his book on sealing, Chafe discusses some of these contributory elements:

> The situation of the harbour, with wide mouth, its high lands and deep waters right next to the cliff gave the ice no chance to hold on when the westerly wind blew and therefore the craft found their way out much more easily than from other harbours in the bay like Harbour Grace and Bay Roberts. Many stated that it was the advantage of the harbour that gave Brigus all the success, but it was really the strenuous activity of the ship-owners.[28]

At the end of the two fishing seasons the Bartletts and other captains brought their vessels to Riverhead, Brigus (for location see Map 3,p.33).There the seal and cod were transported through a tunnel that had specifically been blasted through the rock to create easy access to

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[26] L.G. Chafe, Chafe's Sealing Book (St. John's: The Trade Printers & Publishers, 1923).

[27] T. Wayne Frye, "Brigus Fisheries between 1836-1921" (Unpublished Manuscript. Available at St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Maritime History Group, F 50, n.d.), p. 10.

[28] Chafe, p. 21.

warehouses on the other side of the hill. The Bartlett name gradually became synonymous with the Newfoundland seal fishery, and these captains brought much fame and glory to the town. A popular local poem exemplifies this:

> Brigus the home of the seal
> and cod,
> Where the Hiscocks speak to
> the Bartletts
> and the Bartletts only to God.[29]

As the seal and cod fisheries grew so did the smaller industries. In 1847, forty vessels were being built in Brigus. The building of these great ocean-going schooners--together with the equipping and maintenance of fleets--opened up industries which provided some variation in Brigus's economy. The main industries created were boat-building, house construction, and the manufacture of seal oil. The labour force needed to supply the manpower for these, in turn, caused an influx of common labourers as well as professionals and tradespeople: "The population was too small to fill all the jobs caused by the demand for more ships and houses; shipwrights, carpenters, sailmakers, and apprentices poured in from England and Ireland."[30] By 1874 there were four clergymen, one doctor, eighteen

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[29] Sam Lamson, "The Fishing Economy of Brigus North" (Unpublished Manuscript. Available at St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Thomas F. Nemec Archive, n.d.), p. 7.

[30] William Bartlett, "History of Brigus" (Unpublished Manuscript. Available at Brigus: Rupert Bartlett's private collection, n.d.), p. 2.

merchants and tradesmen, thirty-seven mechanics and craftsmen, and twenty-two engaged in office or shop work.[31]

This increased economic activity, in turn, created a number of social changes. These included a more diversified society, ranging from wealthy captains, to professionals and merchants, to craftsmen, and finally to fishermen and labourers. In addition, Brigus became a communication and public services centre with a telegraph office, a post office, and headquarters for the district court. This was also a time of increased material wealth for a select few.

Overall, the nineteenth century was a tremendous period of growth and prosperity for Brigus. Rev. Philip Tocque wrote, "The Mundens, Normans . . . Bartletts, Roberts and Wilcoxs reside here, who are some of the richest planters in Newfoundland."[32] He further added, "Brigus is well cultivated and for the extent of population has a large number of good residences."[33] During this time the community was a beehive of activity,

> So they say, you could walk along and there was the blacksmith at work beating his anvil, sparks flying everywhere; the

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[31]Newfoundland, Colonial Secretary's Office, Abstract Census & Return of Population of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1874, p. 36.

[32]Philip Tocque, Newfoundland: as it was and is in 1877 (Toronto: J.B. Magurn, 1878), p. 119.

[33]Tocque, p. 119.

> wheelwright fixing a cart, and yes the cooper, and just all manner of work to fill the whole place with bustle.[34]

But though this was a developing period of job diversity, the sea still remained the main source of income for the majority of the residents and the primary shaping force of all other activity, "'Twas the fisheries made us and fed us."[35]

Frowns of Fortune: Downfall of the Brigus Fisheries in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the Newfoundland fishery went into a serious depression, markets fell and prices dropped. This period saw a change of fortune for Brigus. When the fisheries began to decline, the smaller communities like Brigus were the first to fade because the big mercantile companies were more willing to back the larger economic centres such as Harbour Grace and St. John's.

As the merchants shifted to St. John's, the seal fishery followed close on their heels. With these shifts, and the decline of the Labrador fishery, the majority of the subsidiary industries in Brigus were forced to close down. This decline is reflected in the 1901 census returns, which recorded a population of 1,162 and the number of

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[34] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[35] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

merchants and traders to be two.[36] These were drastic changes compared to only ten years earlier.

Brigus, which had boasted forty vessels going to the ice in the late 1840's, sent out only four in 1878. "With the decline of the sailing fleet many of our masters went in charge of steamers owned by St. John's and Harbour Grace firms. . . ."[37] In 1877 Tocque recorded,

> Nearly the whole trade of Brigus has been removed to St. John's and Harbour Grace. The last large mercantile firm belonging here, Robert Brown and Co., has removed to St. John's.[38]

Patterns of Change: The Twentieth Century

Toward the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century major changes began to occur in Newfoundland's economy. These developments included: the building of a railway across the island; the opening up of logging industries and paper mills, initially at Grand Falls and later at Corner Brook; and the exploitation of mining, both on Bell Island and at Buchans. For the first time in its history, employment totally unconnected with the sea was possible for a considerable number of people.[39] But, while

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[36] Newfoundland, Colonial Secretary's Office, Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1901, Vol. I (St. John's: J.W. Withers, Queen's Printer, 1903), pp. 26-31.

[37] Bartlett, p. 3.

[38] Tocque, p. 121.

[39] Story, p. 31.

periodically reverting to such work in the off-season, Brigus men continued to turn to the fishery. As Rich Fowler remarked, "Me father u'd go to Buchans in the winter months to pick up some extra work see, but he'd all'ys be back for the fishery."[40]

Not until the mid-twentieth century did fundamental changes begin to take place in its rural community life-style. The Second World War and Confederation with Canada in 1949 generated the transformation of the traditional economy and society by creating a ready cash flow, an enormous demand for industrialization, urbanization, and a ready labour force,

> and the last war, well that finished it. Because the Americans came here and they were building the bases, and a lot of money got in circulation and everybody got working and things change.[41]

In fact, World War Two and Confederation, accelerated changes that had already begun. Traditional Newfoundland in general, and Brigus in particular, existed because of the demand for and wealth of fish in its waters. The 1920's witnessed the collapse of foreign markes for salt fish, and the emergence of foreign deep-sea trawlers that were beginning to exploit the off-shore fishery year-round. The traditional small-boat operations of communities like

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[40] Rich Fowler, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[41] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

Brigus, which prosecuted seasonally in inshore waters, were no competition for the technologically superior foreign fishing fleets, and gradually became less and less viable.

> Oh, we had to give up fishing, we couldn't make a living on it anymore. When we, the last summer we fished we got $1.60 for a hundred and twelve pounds of fish. Now you go to the supermarket and pay over two dollars a pound. We just couldn't stand up to it.[42]

Instead of continuing to pursue the mode of work of their fathers, the young began to search out more lucrative alternatives. These were readily available due to the war and Confederation, and many of the young people from Brigus migrated to areas offering such employment. This movement is reflected in the 1951 census, which records a dwindling population of 754 residents.[43]

Around this time as well, Joey Smallwood, the first Premier of Newfoundland, initiated a program of technological advancements which included roads linking isolated communities to the outside world, the availability of mass media, hydroelectric power, and improved medical and education facilities. G.M. Story sums up the transition-in-progress,

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[42] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[43] Canada, Bureau of Statistics, Twelfth Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1951 (Ottawa: Bureau of Statistics, 1956), p. 125.

> Most apparent is the end of the age of the fisherman, hunter, planter, and merchant: the replacement . . . of an economy dependent on the sea to one dependent on the land; and the change from a traditional preindustrial society to an increasingly urbanized, industrial and consumer society.[44]

This century has witnessed Brigus in a continual process of change, all of the roads in the community are now paved, everyone has electricity, most have plumbing, and a good percentage have telephones and televisions. But for many, these conveniences are not enough, and they aspire to move to places that offer more modern lifestyles.

Evidence of depopulation and the decline of affluence can be seen throughout the community. Around Inner Harbour Pond there exists a legacy of vacant stores and open land where there was once a tremendous amount of craftsmen activity. In the Frog Marsh area there is a deserted valley, where previously a whole segment of the community lived.

At present, the general tendency of the young is to leave Brigus to pursue permanent year-round employment in Labrador or on the mainland; or to attend trade school or university, and then later move on to cities that offer better employment opportunities. For those who have remained, a small percentage are full-time fishermen, some work in the local stores, at the schools as teachers, on government-funded road crews, with the power commission,

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[44]Story, p. 33.

and the largest percent, at the fish plant. The rest of the labour force commute daily to St. John's or other commercial centres for work. But those that continue to reside in the community, whether they work within the town or commute elsewhere, and whatever their means of livelihood, have retained, to varying degrees, aspects of their traditional heritage.

The Traditional Heritage

From the time of its original settlement, the traditional character of Brigus was determined by the organization of its fishery. From the late spring through to the late fall, schools of fish swarmed into the Newfoundland waters in abundance, and this period saw fathers and sons, or teams of two or three neighbours, fishing the nearby grounds each day, with trawl lines or jiggers.

> Oh my, this was a busy time of year for us. Me brother and me self, we always went down, and we used to have a man with us see. And we'd be dragging those nets just about every day.[45]

What they harvested from the sea was caught for personal consumption and served also as a form of exchange. The fishermen traded their salted and dried cod with the local merchant for items they could not make or produce themselves, such as fishing gear, salt, flour, beef, tea,

[45] Story, p. 33.

molasses, kerosene, and cloth. As both income and cash needs for the families were low, money was rarely seen, and credit with the merchant took its place. This relationship was further strengthened by other services provided by the merchant, such as advising the families regarding wills, deeds, government regulations, and education.[46]

In addition to fishing, the people also cultivated "gardens"[47] and tended livestock. These activities generally provided enough vegetables and dairy products for family consumption throughout the year, as Birdie Roberts told me: "Yes girl, if we had a good growing season we'd be well provided for. That and the fresh laid eggs and the cows milk and a pig or two."[48]

As well as storing the produce in a root cellar located up behind the garden, many of the vegetables were pickled and bottled. Quantities of local berries, such as

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[46]For more information concerning the relationship between fisherman/merchant see John Szwed, Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies, No. 2 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1966), pp. 41-43; and Wilfred Wareham, Intro., The Little Nord Easter: Reminiscences of a Placentia Bayman, MUNFLA Publications Community Studies Series, No. 1, by Victor Butler (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1975), pp. 1-24.

[47]"Garden" is a local term used to designate the plot of cultivated land where vegetables are grown.

[48]Birdie Roberts, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

blueberries and partridgeberries, were preserved into jams and jellies and set aside to supplement the other food supplies.

The women were responsible for many of these activities, as well as the daily household maintenance:

> Oh the women would do much of the work. Gardens and then you'd do a bit of farming. They'd all the cattle to tend to. Women would do it all, and the cleaning and baking too.[49]

In addition to this, the women also made much of the clothing that was worn,

> You'd hear the old spinning wheel and that would be humming. You could hear it out on the road. You'd have to card it and roll it, wash it. Yes they could make it better than the machines. They were crackerjacks. Used to knit all the mits and gloves and the socks and sweaters and even the drawers for the men.[50]

While the women tended to the domestic responsibilities, the men were often involved in various aspects of the fishery, even in the off-season. When they were not out on the water fishing they were busy repairing their equipment or building a boat. Besides being well versed in boat construction, they also built their own homes, sheds and barns. And when they were not busy at this, they were often out in the woods cutting and hauling wood for fuel or hunting for

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[49] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[50] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

game such as moose, rabbit and grouse.

In the midst of this work activity there was a good deal of cooperation and shared effort. Often this was done, in an indirect way and involved a sense of reciprocity,

> If you were going to shingle the roof of your house for instance in the spring of the year, all you had to do was say 'I got to shingle my house tomorrow,' and you'd start and the men would come and help you. And all you had to do was stand and look at them. You know they would start in and do the job, thats all there was to it see. And then maybe if one of those men were hauling a boat up, just say the word and there we'd be, men enough there to take the boat and bring it up the hill.[51]

As well as "lending a helping hand when it was needed," there were other times involving personal interaction between community members and these were frequent. "Regardless that there were few hours for idleness we could always find time for a bit of human contact see."[52] Probably the most informal and common of these was the "house visit," particularly in the evening when most of the chores and responsibilities of the day had been taken care of,

> I remember when we lived in the older house, we used to have to go up to the bedroom to learn our lesson some evenings, because the neighbours would

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[51] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[52] Birdie Roberts, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> round, everybody would come. Yes, one time we had a houseful every night.[53]

These "times" served as a means of entertainment, and afforded people the opportunity to mix, to gossip, to transmit local and world news, and, in the process, to establish and reinforce friendships,

> And they'd set and have a chat, and maybe me mother, she'd read the newspaper to them. Or maybe some of the crackerjack story tellers would give a yarn, oh about a ghost, that by the end of it would make the people visiting half afraid to walk home. It was a good time, it was a time of closeness and good feeling.[54]

Less common were the social occasions that were peculiar to specific seasons. These were looked forward to with great anticipation, for they provided the community--and the adults in particular--with a short respite for a great deal of visiting and drinking. Summer usually included events such as weddings, community concerts, and church garden parties. Winter brought Bonfire Night, Christmas "times," and Christmas Mummering. Of these seasonal celebrations, the one which was of greatest interest to the children, and the one in which they were most deeply involved was the Bonfire Night,

> Sure it was the child's night. It was that time of year when the children were

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[53] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

[54] Tom Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4282.

> the masters, and they did it all,
> adults were not allowed.[55]

Changing Times

Experiencing Brigus today, it is readily apparent that the change in the economy has altered other aspects of life as well. The former annual cycle of work and leisure was once patterned into a familiar and stabilizing routine.[56] But with the modification of this, the shared occupational structure, the central position of the church in community life, and social and familial interdependence have been rearranged. But though these have been altered, and in spite of the fact that members of the community will comment that "the old life is gone," there are many traditional characteristics that have remained and been incorporated into the "changing times," while only a few have vanished completely.

For many, the woods are still an important source of fuel, food, and building materials. A great number of families also continue to maintain small vegetable gardens. And those that are no longer fishermen by trade still go out on the water occasionally to procure fish for family

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[55] Birdie Roberts, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[56] For more information concerning cyclical/seasonal outport life see Chart 4 in James C. Faris, Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies, No. 3 (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972), pp. 178-79.

consumption. Though none of these activities is carried on to the extent that it used to be, there is still evidence of a continuing sense of familiarity with the natural environment and traditional technical skills. The children know exactly where all the best berry picking areas are located, can easily find their way around in the woods, and are well versed in the fine arts of jigging cod and chopping firewood.

The social environment, as well, is still a familiar and intimate realm. People are still personable, and practically everyone in the community knows everyone else. Residents also continue to share and cooperate in one another's ventures.

> People still give a hand you know. Now I was working on the house the other day and a neighbour came by, and before I knew it there he was giving me a hand.[57]

Even some traditional social occasions still exist to a certain degree, although a few such as the garden parties and the "times," are becoming more formalized and centralized. For example, institutions like the nearby Knights of Columbus, the local Orange Legion, and the high school organize the majority of the social functions for the youth and adults. On weekend nights particularly, these organizations sponsor a dance, a card game, bingo, or a movie.

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[57] Albert Sparks, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Slowly disappearing are the more informal and casual occasions like the house visits. "People just don't visit anymore," is a complaint often heard in Brigus today. Local interpretation places much of the blame on the presence of mass media,

> And now there's no one visits. I don't know, I think coming up with the radio and television changed all of that.[58]

In addition to the dwindling frequency of the casual occasions, seasonal occasions such as Christmas Mummering and community concerts have completely disappeared.[59]

But one of the seasonal traditional occasions in Brigus that shows no evidence whatsoever of disappearing with modernization is Bonfire Night. This celebration is still reenacted with all the fervour and excitement that it had in former times. Just why it has maintained its presence while other types of traditional occasions are dwindling will be explored in the following chapters.

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[58] Daisy Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C4284.

[59] There is obviously no easy explanation for these or other diminishing modes of traditional activity, but the fact that they are fading is certainly symptomatic of deeper concerns. The reasons for these social changes are very complicated and have not yet been documented fully by social scientists.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CELEBRATION

Since the beginning of recorded custom, societies in all parts of the world have come together intermittently to celebrate and rejoice.

> Most, if not all of the societies of the world periodically set aside portions of time for celebration. These are moments of transition, from one season to another or from one stage of life to another; they may be anniversaries or historical events . . . or symbolic reenactments of events in the life of a religious leader or the founder of a society. They may be moments set aside or occasions for communal work, with feasting and play added.[1]

In earlier times, these were primarily of a religious or ceremonial nature, but gradually many of the sacred aspects of these occasions began to take on secular qualities.

Of particular interest here is the development of that category known as seasonal fire festivals. Compared to other celebrations throughout the ages, those with fire as a prominent feature have had a greater survival rate, and are still in evidence in some contemporary cultures. In the following pages I will explore aspects of this

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[1] Robert Jerome Smith, "Festivals and Celebrations," in Folklore and Folklife, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 159.

phenomenon with specific reference to: man's propensity to use fire as a metaphor; its presence as such in festivals through time, with a concentration on those celebrated in the fall; the expression of this in the English Guy Fawkes tradition; and, its subsequent manifestation in Newfoundland as the November fifth "bonfire celebration."

Fire as Metaphor

Fire has always held an irresistible attraction for mankind. This psychological fascination stems from its physical characteristics. In his preface to Gaston Bachelard's The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Northrop Frye reveals some of these links.

> To the imagination, fire is not a separable datum of experience: it is already linked by analogy and identity with a dozen other aspects of experience. Its heat is analogous to the internal heat we feel as warm-blooded animals; its flickering movement is analogous to vitality; its flames are phallic symbols . . . its transforming power is analogous to purgation. These links of analogy are so adhesive that they spread all over the universe. . . .[2]

These physical properties can help to explain the metaphorical usage of fire by mankind since antiquity.[3]

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[2]Northrop Frye, Pref., The Psychoanalysis of Fire, by Gaston Bachelard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. VI.

[3]I use the terms metaphor and symbol interchangeably throughout the manuscript. My definition for both is: something that represents something else by association

Perhaps the two most familiar characteristics of fire are its ability to create and destroy. Physically, it can spontaneously and rapidly reproduce, growing from a minute spark to a raging blaze while metaphorically this can represent the process of birth and growth. It can also destroy, by disposing of unwanted waste materials such as old furniture or useless weeds. But uncontrolled, it can destroy homes, goods, and human life itself.

Other qualities include change and continuity. Not only is the flame forever changing its form, but the flame itself can transform substances from one thing to another: raw meat into cooked meat; coal into heat; or a solid into a liquid. Metaphorically, this characteristic can be seen in the purgatorial and redemptive powers of fire in religions such as Catholicism, where the soul is purged of all its sins in the burning fires of purgatory and hence redeemed so that it may enter the gates of heaven. The permanence of fire is exemplified in the continual presence of the sun, often perceived as a ball of fire. From this identification extends both the everpresent hearthfire, which often personifies familial continuity, and the altar fire, which represents eternity or immortality.

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or resemblance. For detailed discussions of fire as an archetype symbol see Gaston Bachelard The Psychoanalysis of Fire; Philip Wheelwright The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954); and Wheelwright Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967).

As a natural element, fire serves both to give comfort and to cause pain. It is a source of heat, providing warmth when one is cold. It is also a source of light, producing visibility and clarity. So too, it can cause physical pain, when the heat gets too strong or the light too bright.

Fire can also represent the interior/personal or the exterior/universal. As the interior/personal, it symbolizes the sexuality of man, the "burning inside of the loins." It is also the thought-provoking, reverie side of man. In fact, not only does it stimulate the mind to muse, but it also represents the sudden illuminations of the mind, such as when a brilliant idea occurs. The exterior/universal property of fire is its physical presence. It cannot be ignored; rather, it commands attention either by being felt or seen.

Consequently fire can be looked upon as having multiple characteristics, some of them seemingly at odds with one another. But, for all of its seeming contradictions--and perhaps because of them--fire has always played an integral part in man's formulation of explanations for his surrounding physical and metaphysical world. As early as the sixth century B.C., there is recorded evidence of this in the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus. For him, "This universe always has been, is, and will be-an everliving fire, kindling itself by regular measures and

going out by regular measures."[4]

As well as exemplifying the concepts of continuity and change, Heraclitus felt that fire illustrated different phases of human life: periods of craving and periods of satiety. He felt that man was not a homogenous being but, rather, that he went through times of yearning, need, and struggle, and then through ones of satisfaction and rest. These human phases, he suggested, were analogous to fire which "throws about and then brings back together again; it advances and retires."[5]

Besides philosophical notions, there are also belief systems in which fire has played a major role. These include the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, in which it was considered the universal and eternal principle around which everything else revolved; and Hinduism, where it acts as ". . . the indispensible precondition of all other substances."[6]

Fire Festivals Through the Ages

Perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of the integral role that fire has played in ritual and ceremony through the ages is Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough. This work began as a study on the origin of the myth of

[4]Wheelwright, Heraclitus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 37.

[5]Wheelwright, Heraclitus, p. 37.

[6]Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain, p. 309.

the priest of Nemi, but gradually developed into an elaborate exploration of the relationship between man and nature in "primitive" societies.[7] What evolved was a monumental text which includes a detailed discussion of the development of fire festivals, particularly those celebrated in European tradition.[8] In the introduction to that section, Frazer wrote,

> All over Europe the peasants have been accustomed from time immemorial to kindle bonfires on certain days of the year, and to dance round or leap over them.[9]

Frazer argued that early man interpreted fire in two ways: as a life force and as a disinfectant. The life force property developed from the element's innate ability to grow and spread. This in turn, Frazer reasoned, was what man connected through imitative magic with the power of

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[7]To better understand Frazer's train of thought, one must have a knowledge of the era in which he wrote. For an excellent discussion of this see Mary Douglas, Intro., The Illustrated Golden Bough, by Sir James Frazer (London: Rainbird, 1978), pp. 9-15.

[8]Other works have been written on this topic, but their focus is toward a more specific geographical area. See R.U. Sayce, "The Seasonal Bonfires," The Montgomeryshire Collections, The Transactions of the Powysland Club, 50(1947), 77-91 and 189-209, for a western European tradition; See Alan Gailey, "The Bonfire in North Irish Tradition," Folklore, 88(1977), pp. 3-39; Venetia Newall, "Two English Fire Festivals in Relation to their Contemporary Setting," Western Folklore, 31(1972), 244-74; and Christina Hole, "Winter Bonfires," Folklore, 71(1960), pp. 217-27, for a British Isles tradition.

[9]Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: The Book League of America, 1929), II, p. 706.

the sun to promote growth and vitality. Drawing from Wilhelm Mannhandt's solar theory of fire in which he described it as a stimulant in the minds of those who used it, Frazer wrote,

> The fires are magical ceremonies intended, on the principle of imitative magic, to insure a needful supply of sunshine for man, animals, and plants by kindling fires which mimic on earth the great source of light and heat in the sky.[10]

Frazer explained the disinfectant property in terms of Edward Westermarch's purification theory. Westermarch believed that fire was employed as a cleansing agent to purify both man and his surroundings by consuming noxious elements that threatened them. Borrowing from this, Frazer deduced that fires were kindled for,

> . . . purification in intention, being designed to burn up and destroy all harmful influences, whether they are conceived in a personal form as witches, demons, etc. . . . or in an impersonal way as a sort of prevailing taint or corruption of the air.[11]

In effect, Frazer argued that fire was used by man as an attempt to come to terms with the perplexities of both his natural and supernatural environment, either positively by stimulating them, or negatively by destroying the dangerous elements which jeopardized them.

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[10]Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 744.

[11]Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 744.

Frazer proposed that what evolved through time were two major kinds of fire festivals: the occasional and the seasonal. The occasional fires he described as those which were held at irregular intervals of the season. One of these was the "need" fire, which was prepared whenever it was considered necessary to dissipate something undesirable, such as the threat of plague or famine. Other occasional fires included those lit in celebration of an event or person, such as ones for political affairs, birthdays, or weddings; for personal amusement; or as a spontaneous expression of passing emotion.

Frazer suggested that the other major category, the seasonal fire, may have developed directly from the occasional "need" fire. He determined that there arose the custom of lighting bonfires on certain specified days of the year, as a preventive measure, that rather than lighting them when pestilence broke out (as in the case of the "need" fire), the custom eventually developed to kindle them at regular intervals to avert such occurrences.

Frazer further suggested that these times were transitional periods, when the seasons were changing, and when the crops were being harvested or planted. They were also considered to be uncanny or mystical days--when the ordinary predictable world and that of the supernatural became unusually thin--when witches and fairies, or other supernatural creatures lurked about.

In his comprehensive study of seasonal celebrations, E.O. James comments upon the close relationship between early man and nature and its subsequent expression in the seasonal festivals:

> From time immemorial the seasonal sequence has arrested the attention of mankind and aroused an intense emotional reaction in all states and stages of culture and types of society extending from the upper Paleolithic in prehistoric times to the higher civilizations of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, with repercussions on the subsequent development of customs, belief and behavior in the intervening ages. . . . Everywhere and at all times the means of subsistence have been the primary concern and from this fundamental requirement recurrent seasonal periodic festivals have sprung.[12]

The most popular and widespread of the seasonal fire festivals among early European man were those celebrated at the celestial divisions of the year, the summer and winter solstices; and those celebrated at the terrestrial divisions, the beginning of each of the four seasons, particularly summer and winter.[13]

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[12] E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals (London: Thames & Hudson, 1961), p. 15.

[13] The summer and winter solstice festival dates are June twenty-first and December twenty-first respectively. The four seasonal fire festival dates are Samhain, November first; Imbolc, February first; Beltane, May first; and Lugnasa, August first. These were all originally celebrated among a pastoral people whose major concern apart from themselves was for their herds of animals. In later times as civilizations settled and became agriculturally oriented, they continued to celebrate the festivals, only then the crops also became a major concern.

Whatever their celebratory date, they all had a recurring open-air festive ceremony with bonfires as a prominent element.[14] Other widely shared features included leaping over the fires, driving cattle through or around them, hurling lighted discs into the air, tumbling burning wheels downhill, and processions of blazing torches around fields or other areas to be protected.[15]

Another element of these festivals, though how common is not known, was the burning of human beings in the fire. Frazer suggests that those burned were believed to be malign spirits that brought pestilence to livestock and men, and that in the process of burning them, their dangerous abilities were destroyed. Once they were demolished, community health and welfare were insured and fertility was promoted.

Of all of the seasonal festivals, the one most directly relevant to the November fifth Brigus bonfire celebration is the Celtic Samhain fire festival which was celebrated on November first or the eve thereof. November first was

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[14]The one exception to this is the winter solstice fire festival which, in Christian times, has developed into the ceremony of the Yule log. This celebration is characterized by its privacy and domesticity. But, as Frazer points out, this may simply be due to the cold mid-winter season in which it occurs, rendering a public open air assembly undesirable.

[15]For more detailed discussions of any one of these see Frazer's chapter "The Fire Festivals of Europe," in The Golden Bough, pp. 610-17; E.O. James Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, pp. 312-19; and Maire MacNeill, The Festival of Lughnasa (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

an occasion of great importance in the Celtic calendar as it represented the New Year, the beginning of winter, and the time of year when the herds returned to fold.

To fully understand the importance of Samhain, it must be taken into account that in ancient times, life and death were often symbolized in the yearly movements of the sun. And because November was the beginning of the earth's decay and the sun's strength was weakening, the Samhain fires were lit to rejuvenate it, as well as to combat any malevolent spirits skulking about. In particular the souls of the dead had great power on the eve of November first, for it was believed that they were free on this night to roam their former earthly homes and to visit their relatives. Because they were sometimes considered hostile, means had to be taken to protect man from them.

With the passage of time, as Christianity began to take a firm hold throughout Europe, changes began to be initiated in the customs and beliefs that the church considered to be "pagan." Prominent among these were the fire festivals, including Samhain.

When the Christian liturgical year was instituted throughout Europe, the calendar was reorganized around ecclesiastical festivals and the commemoration of martyrs and saints, and gradually these celebrations absorbed all others. At this time, the Christian festival of All Saints was transferred from its original date, May thirteenth, to November first. This was a conscious effort on the part

of the church to incorporate the "pagan rituals" of Samhain.

Many of the traditions of Samhain were retained, however, particularly on the October thirty-first celebration of All Hallow's Eve. Because this festival is on the eve of what was once Samhain, many of the beliefs and practices associated with it transferred themselves to what eventually became popularly known in many western cultures as Hallowe'en. In fact, as recently as the nineteenth century, there was evidence of a supernatural association with Hallowe'en, with fires used as a form of protection. Buchanan states that in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, "They burnt a fire outside of the door to keep away evil spirits,"[16] and Christina Hole remarks,

> If Christianity sanctified the pagan season with new masses and feast-days, it did not put out the Hallowe'en fires, which continued to blaze upon countless hills and cairns until almost the end of the nineteenth century . . . the Hallow fires were lit at dusk, for luck, for saining of the fields, for protection against the fairies and witches who had taken the place of forgotten pagan spirits, and very certainly, for the sake of fun and merriment.[17]

So essentially, except for minor modifications and a change in name, the celebration retained many of its former

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[16] Ronald H. Buchanan, "Calendar Customs," in Ulster Folklife, 9 (1963), p. 87.

[17] Christina Hole, British Folk Customs (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 87.

characteristics. But in time, it began to take on a more secular nature with the supernatural and religious aspects being relegated to the background. Hallowe'en eventually became a period for mischief and practical jokes because, as Buchanan explains it, the mischief could be ". . . allied to the belief in supernatural activity, for such pranks could always be blamed on fairies."[18] In his book Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, James discusses this transition from sacred to secular:

> In the course of the year every human society faces a period of uncertainty when its future food supply is in balance; symbolic acts intended to encourage animals to breed or plants to grow have thus been practiced by human societies from the earliest times . . . but with the passage of time many modifications must have occurred as a result of movement to different environments and in response to changes in the total culture . . . in many instances it would seem that the pagan ritual was transformed into purely secular institutions, surviving in the games, feasts, processions and customs appropriate to certain days.[19]

So, though aspects of the Hallowe'en festival, such as the lighting of bonfires and rolling of burning wheels, were no longer serious attempts to imitate the sun's abilities, they still survived.

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[18]Buchanan, "Calendar Customs," p. 66.

[19]James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p. 79.

The English Guy Fawkes Tradition

The fire activities associated with the Hallowe'en festival were later attached to the English Guy Fawkes tradition. This celebration developed out of an incident that took place on November fifth 1605, when a group of Catholic revolutionaries were caught in the midst of their treasonous attempt to blow up Protestant king and Parliament with kegs of gunpowder. In commemoration of the discovery of the "Gunpowder Plot," and the hanging of one of its conspirators, Guido Fawkes, bonfires blazed throughout the English countryside in public jubilation.[20]

This celebration took immediate hold in the popular imagination and developed into an annual reenactment of the burning of the "Guy." Poor Robins Almanac for 1677 noted November fifth thus,

> Now boys with
> squibs and crackers
> play,
> And bonfires blaze
> turn night to day.[21]

Christina Hole, in British Folk Customs, suggests that its initial popularity was due to the fact that England was experiencing a tremendous amount of religious strife at

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[20] For a detailed account of the historical event, see Christina Hole, "Guy Fawkes Day," In British Folk Customs, pp. 84-86; and Lawrence Whistler The English Festivals (London: Heinemann, 1947), pp. 202-12.

[21] A.R. Wright, England, Vol. III of British Calendar Customs (London: Glaisher, 1940), p. 147.

this time and such an occasion appealed to Protestant sentiments.

> Every man who helped to build a bonfire on the village green, or on some local hill-top, felt that in so doing he was somehow helping to destroy the dreaded power of Rome. So too, when he made an effigy of Guy Fawkes . . . and threw it to the flames, he felt he was striking a blow for England and freedom.[22]

Guy Fawkes Day is still enthusiastically celebrated in various regions of the British domain.[23] Though it is no longer held for its original intent, ". . . rejoicing at the frustrations of a Popish Plot,"[24] it has continued, and in fact, has become the main seasonal fire-festival in many parts of England.[25] Discussing this, Hole states,

> It has long outlived the old fears and religious animosities that gave it birth; and the fact that it flourishes today, more than three centuries after the event, is almost certainly due to its

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[22]Hole, "Winter Bonfires," p. 219.

[23]It is currently celebrated throughout the British Isles, and in parts of Australia and Ganada. There is also documentation in Dorothy Spicer Yearbook of English Festivals (1954; rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1972), stating that English settlers brought the tradition with them to the New England colonies in the seventeenth century.

[24]Geoffrey Palmer and Noel Lloyd, A Year of Festivals: A Guide to British Calendar Customs (London: Frederick Warne, 1972), p. 82.

[25]The most contemporary and complete study of the British Guy Fawkes celebration is Venetia Newall's article, "Two English Fire Festivals in Relation to their Contemporary Social Setting," in which she discusses Ottery St. Mary's event.

> having absorbed, as time went on, most of the far older fire-and-mischief-customs that rightly belong to Hallowtide.[26]

Though there has been regional variation through time, generally speaking, the English Guy Fawkes celebration still resembles Chambers' nineteenth century description,

> The universal mode of observance through all parts of England is the dressing up of a scarecrow figure in such cast habiliments as can be procured (the head piece, generally paper-cap, painted and knotted with paper stripes in imitation of ribbons) parading it in a chair through the streets, and at nightfall burning it with great solemnity in a huge bonfire.[27]

In the daytime, as the children march their "Guy" in public procession through the streets, they can be heard chanting rhymes descriptive of the occasion.

> Remember, remember the Fifth of November,
> Gunpowder Treason and Plot;
> I see no reason why Gunpowder Treason
> Should ever be forgot.
> A stick and a stake
> For King George's sake
> Holla, boys, Holla, make the town ring;
> Holla, boys, holla, boys, God save the King.[28]

In addition to this, they can often be seen travelling from house to house begging "a penny for the 'Guy'," with the

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[26] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 85.

[27] Robert Chambers, The Book of Days, II (London: R. & W. Chambers, 1888), 549-50. Also cited in Newall, "Two English Fire Festivals in Relation to their Contemporary Social Setting."

[28] Spicer, Yearbook of English Festivals, p. 155.

donations eventually being pooled to buy fireworks and other materials for the bonfires.

While discussing the presence of the Guy and the fact that, on occasion, it has been replaced by later detested individuals such as Napoleon and Hitler, Hole notes,

> In some districts, the Guy is the central feature of the celebration; in others, it is of secondary importance, or does not appear at all.[29]

"The true essential today," according to Hole, "is fire."[30] This is readily apparent by the prominent role it plays in the celebration. Besides the bonfires, there are often other fire-related activities as well. "On this night the sky is bright with fireworks everywhere."[31] Many communities also carry on torch-light processions in which they traverse the town with their fiery brands.

> Lewes has splendid torchlight processions which continue from dusk until nearly midnight, and there are similar fire-parades at Bridgewater, Battle, Edenbridge, Newhaven, and some other places.[32]

In some villages blazing tar-barrels are rolled through the streets.

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[29] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 86.

[30] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 86.

[31] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 86.

[32] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 86.

> At Burford in Oxfordshire, two such barrels were sent hurtling down the long steep High Street at midnight, rolling and bounding downwards in a whirl of sparks and flame, like two small suns suddenly fallen from the sky.[33]

Newfoundland's November Fifth Bonfire Celebrations

With its geographical shift to a locality in North America, and in a different cultural context, the fall fire festival has become popularly known in Newfoundland as "Bonfire Night." Though this is by far the most commonly used name, some areas of the island refer to it as "Bon-a-fire Night," or "Bonnie-fire Night." It is also called "Guy Fawkes Night" on occasion, but this is infrequent, and as one Newfoundlander noted,

> 'Guy Fawkes' is only used by old people around the community. You won't catch nobody now-a-days calling it that. It's just 'Bonfire Night' to us.[34]

In addition to the fading of its original name, other historically significant aspects of the celebration are vanishing as well.

> I don't think anybody ever has the feeling that he is celebrating anything in particular. Bonfires are held for their own sakes, and few

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[33] Hole, British Folk Customs, p. 86.

[34] Maurice Kelly, Fieldnotes, Spring 1981.

> there are who actually know anything about Guy Fawkes or the origination of the custom.[35]

As knowledge of the details of the Gunpowder Plot have become vague, the once strong religious association is beginning to diminish as well, and people today seldom make any connection between that and the contemporary celebration. This prevailing attitude is expressed in remarks such as, "It don't matter what religion you belongs to, Protestant and Catholic alike celebrate it."[36] Though the general tendency appears to be that both denominations celebrate Bonfire Night together on November fifth, there are some exceptions.[37] These include: all-Catholic communities, such as Cape Broyle, that celebrate Bonfire Night on June twenty-fourth, in honour of St. John the Baptist; all-Catholic communities, such as Calvert, that celebrate Bonfire Night on October thirty-first; or certain Catholic families in a denominationally-mixed community, who do not take part in the prevailing November fifth celebration, and have a private bonfire on another date.

As well as distance and time causing changes in Bonfire Night, the physical geography of the island has also had its effect. This can be seen in two features of the

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[35] MUNFLA, Ms., 70-9/p. 60.

[36] Donna Frye, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[37] These celebrations are carried on much less extensively than the November fifth one, and primarily in all-Catholic communities or enclaves.

celebration which are directly related to one another: the number of bonfires burned and their placement in the community. It appears that the more a community is surrounded by hills, the more bonfires it will have. If there is only one high promontory, then the community will have a large bonfire there, and perhaps one down on the beach. If it is surrounded by hills, then it is likely that there will be numerous fires. In general, a village will have as many large bonfires as there is physical space of the kind desired to accommodate them.

> Now as there were three geographical sections to the town of Spaniards Bay there were three rival factions of teenagers when it came to such things as Bonnie-fire night. This meant that on November fifth there would be three large fires in the making - in the west the boys would have their fire near the railway track, the bunch from the northern cove would have their fire on the Brazils hill, and down near the shore we would have our fire on a high hill up behind our house.[38]

Local variation in other features of the celebration include such things as the number of adolescents involved, the degree of participation by females and adults, the length of the bonfire burning, the accompanying activities, and others. But there are certain features that appear everywhere, such as the presence of mischievous antics, lengthy and diligent preparations, male adolescent

[38] MUNFLA, Ms., 71-45/p. 31.

neighbourhood-group involvement, and the use of fire.

Sentiments associated with this celebration are strong and deep. Evidence of this goes beyond the prevalence of the actual enactment itself, for it has frequently been the inspiration of localized songs and poetry as well. In Renews, there was a poem written about an incident in which a resident of the area tried to get the practice banned because she felt it was endangering her property. Responding to her unsuccessful attempt, another resident composed the following verse:

> Oh Aggie dear, don't talk like that,
> And on us do not scorn,
> There was a bonfire, made up here,
> Before ever you were born.[39]

This poem is often recited when people of the area get together and it is especially popular on Bonfire Night. Other examples of this kind include a poem written by a man from Little Harbour, Twillingate, entitled "Uncle Charlie's Punt,"[40] which describes an actual incident concerning the stealing and burning of an old man's boat on November fifth; and a song from Heart's Delight, Trinity Bay, which also documents the burning of a boat on this night.[41]

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[39] MUNFLA, Ms., 73-106/p. 29.

[40] Harold Hardy, "Uncle Charlie's Punt," Decks Awash, August 1980, pp. 33-34.

[41] MUNFLA, Ms., 72-260/p. 33.

The deep-felt sentiments for and the strong attraction to fire are reactions that have found expression since the beginning of human history. Fire has been a major feature in rites, ceremonies, and festivals since early times, and its role as such has persisted to the present. I would argue that man's continued fascination with fire and propensity to use it stems from its capacity to act metaphorically.

Though the metaphorical usage of fire has changed as cultures have developed, its prominence as a metaphor has not. This is illustrated in the popularity of contemporary fire festivals such as Bonfire Night. The metaphorical use of fire in this particular celebration will be explored in Chapter V; while the chapter that follows directly gives a detailed description of the contemporary November fifth bonfire tradition in Brigus which, generally speaking, is representative of what occurs throughout the island.

CHAPTER IV

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE 1980 BRIGUS NOVEMBER FIFTH BONFIRE CELEBRATION

In spite of a number of rapid changes over the past two decades, Brigus is one community in Newfoundland that has continued to maintain some of its traditional activities. Among these is the November fifth Bonfire Night celebration. As Walter Spracklin told me:

> Brigus is really a bonfire place. And I don't know why but it has stayed up for years and years. After I got old enough to pull out it still went on, and I still enjoy it, just watching.[1]

The overview of the celebration I describe below is based primarily on my participant-observation in the community during the fall of 1980. I was also present at the 1977 bonfires, but my fieldwork on that occasion was much less extensive. I use the information I obtained then only in those parts of the description where it is needed to give a more complete picture.

For discussion purposes I have divided the celebration into three stages: the preparations, the lengthy and diligent collecting of materials for the bonfire; the

[1] Walter Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

actual event itself; and the aftermath, what occurred both after the fire died that evening as well as during the next few days.

In Brigus during the fall of 1980 there were three neighbourhood and seven family bonfire celebrations on November fifth (Table 1, Map 4). I witnessed two of these closely and the others sporadically and to varying degrees. The two I maintained close observation of were the Bunker's Hill neighbourhood-group and the Wilkinson's family bonfire celebration. I will give below an account of what I personally viewed and was told about concerning the events relating to all ten of the fires.[2]

My initial visit to Brigus took place in early September. I went there at that time to make arrangements for myself for periodic living accommodation beginning in late September and extending through to mid-November. The few days that I was there during that visit were spent reacquainting myself with people I had known during previous fieldwork including some done on the 1977 Bonfire Night. I saw a number of the adolescents who had participated in that year's celebration, and I met a number of those who

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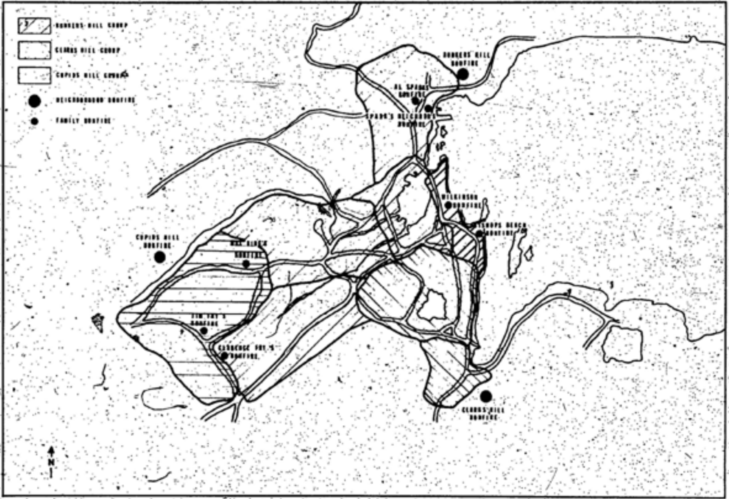
[2]Due to the fact that many of the events relating to the different bonfires occurred spontaneously and in some cases simultaneously, I was not always able to foretell when something would happen, nor was I able to be in more than one place at one time to see events that were happening among different groups at the same time. Therefore, what I describe is more of an overview, and though it is not as complete as I would like, it sets the scene nonetheless.

TABLE 1

THE 1980 NOVEMBER FIFTH BONFIRE CELEBRATION IN BRIGUS

Place/Name of Bonfire	Geographical Locality of Bonfire	Element of the Community Participating	Number of Participants
Al Sparks' Bonfire	Northeastern area of community--family backyard	Family	4
Bishop's Beach Bonfire	South-central area of community--community beach	Family (2)	8
Bunker's Hill Bonfire	Northeastern area of community--on a hill	-Neighbourhood adolescents- Ratley Row youths, Inner Harbour Pond youths, English Town youths, Middle Ridge youths	Approx. 30
Clarence Fry's Bonfire	West-central area of community--family backyard	Family	4
Clarks' Hill Bonfire	South side of community --on a hill	-Neighbourhood adolescents- South Side youths, Riverhead youths	Approx. 15
Cupids Hill Bonfire	Northwestern area of community--on a hill	-Neighbourhood adolescents- Main Road youths	Approx. 20
Jim Fry's Bonfire	Northwestern area of community--family backyard	Family	6
Max King's Bonfire	West-central area of community--family vegetable garden	Family	5
Sparks' Neighbour's Bonfire	Northeastern area of community--family backyard	Family	3
Wilkinson's Bonfire	East-central area of community--family back/beach	Family (2)	10

Map 4. The locations of the 1980 November fifth neighbourhood-group and family bonfires. Also shown are the dwelling areas of the neighbourhood-group participants.


BUNKERS HILL GROUP
CLARKS HILL GROUP
CUPIDS HILL GROUP
NEIGHBOURHOOD BONFIRE
FAMILY BONFIRE
BUNKERS HILL BONFIRE
AL SPADES BONFIRE
SPADE'S NEIGHBOURHOOD BONFIRE
WILKINSON BONFIRE
BISHOPS BEACH BONFIRE
CUPIDS HILL BONFIRE
BONFIRE
JIM FRY'S BONFIRE
CLARENCE FRY'S BONFIRE
CLARKS HILL BONFIRE
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had begun to participate in the more recent ones. Though they had not yet given any attention to the imminent celebration, they did take me around for a tour of the community to point out where the probable bonfires would be this year and what groups would be involved in each one.[3]

Preparations

My second visit to Brigus in 1980 was during the last week in September. I discovered then that the male adolescents had begun to collect materials individually for the neighbourhood-group fires. Three of them from different families, taking part in the same neighbourhood-group bonfire event, told me that they had just begun to store away appropriate materials. Each boy had obtained a tire or two from his own yard or a nearby neighbour's. One boy had the tire stored in his yard underneath a trailer top that was lying on the ground. The other two children both had their tires stored in sheds behind their houses. Though the collecting had begun it was as yet a bit sporadic, and was done only when other more popular forms of activity, such as after school hockey and exploring in woods, lost their ability to occupy the youths' attention.

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[3]The information that the youths gave me on this tour proved to be accurate. That is, all of the bonfires that they anticipated happening actually did take place. From talking with the boys, the three neighbourhood-group fires listed on Table 1 have always been the main fires celebrated in Brigus. They did express the fact though, that there is some variation from year to year concerning the number and places of the family fires.

This level of collecting activity continued into October.

In these early gathering stages the adolescents asked for donations by going from house to house and store to store in the community. Except in the case of the local merchants and tradespeople, the boys asked for materials only from members of their particular neighbourhood, or those people they were most familiar with. They collected anything combustible that was no longer in use--paper, cardboard boxes, pieces of wood, discarded fences, boats and furniture. Especially prized, and the main ingredient for most of the fires, were rubber tires.

> We gets whatever we can now, old cartons, tires, and boughs, and whatever we can get. The thing now is tires. There's lots of them on the go and they burns like the devil.[4]

During the early part of October there was a noticeable difference in the attitudes toward collecting materials for the neighbourhood-group bonfires. The gathering was now being done in earnest, especially on the weekends. The boys began to collect in small groups of two or three as well as individually. They also began to branch out in their collecting, going beyond their immediate neighbourhood asking for donations. When I asked one of the fellows where he had gotten his recently acquired barrels, he explained,

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[4]Steve, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> As they were finished in the [fish] plant, emptying the plant, well I had my eye on them. I got there about closing and asked 'em if I could have the barrels. So's they gave 'em to me.[5]

During this time the three distinct neighbourhood-groups began to form: Bunker's Hill, Cupids Hill, and Clark's Hill (see Table 1, p.85). Whenever I asked one of the boys where his fire was going to be the typical answer was such-and-such a hill. Rich Fowler explained this preference:

> You have it on the highest hill for two reasons: first to be noticed; and second, that you were away from the houses of the community. Brigus is all hills, in case you can see. No problem to have a bonfire.[6]

Each of the three fires was at a different edge of the community and in close proximity to the neighbourhood or neighbourhoods that sponsored it (see Map 4, p.87). The size of each group varied at any one time, but the approximate range was between twelve and thirty (see Table 1, p.85). Those actively participating were always male adolescents, aged ten to twenty, with the majority falling between twelve and sixteen. Birdie Roberts described the age range:

> Could be twelve, could be fifteen, or around eighteen there. Just when there's

[5] Ross Butler, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[6] Rich Fowler, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> lots of life in you, lots on the go, nothing sloff of ya. It's mostly in the school days.[7]

When I asked the boys why there were no females taking part in the lengthy and diligent preparations, I received answers such as, "'Tis more of a man's job," or "Oh girls, they're too lazy." The girls, as well as the adults and young children, were passive participants. They periodically helped in an indirect way, but basically their role was that of spectators.

> The girls sort of stayed back, they stood back. They never--you know this was a man's thing, you know it was. Very few girls. They came to the fires, and had fun and that sort of thing. But the girls didn't really get involved. Not getting boughs and tires and that sort of thing.[8]

The participants in each group lived either in the same neighbourhood or in adjacent neighbourhoods (see Map 4, p.87). If they had formerly participated in the celebration, it was always with the same group each year. When I asked one of the boys how they formed the different groups he explained that they were "the ones you normally play with on Saturday and that kind of stuff. And they live mostly around your neighbourhood, your area."[9]

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[7] Birdie Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C5027.

[8] Geg Hiscock, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[9] Rodney Mercer, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Each member of the group would initially collect materials on his own and store them in his family cellar, barn or other suitable area. But gradually as the materials began to pile up, as the storage places threatened to be filled to capacity, and as Bonfire Night drew closer, the groups began to store their materials collectively in a large space such as a barn or uninhabited house.

The morning of the second Saturday in October found members of the Bunker's Hill group transporting their private accumulations from houses in the Middle Ridge, English Town, and Inner Harbour Pond neighbourhoods, to the large collective centre. They were being wheeled, carted, and biked from all directions to an old house up in Ratley Row (Photo 2 & Photo 3).[10] This activity drew a great deal of attention, both from very young children and adults standing along the lane watching with obvious interest. One of the older men, Rich Fowler, remarked as he watched the boys trudge up the road,

> They work like little dogs after school and Saturdays, dragging and wheeling those things. If they had to do it for their parents they'd moan and groan and say 'twas child labour and slave labour and everything, yes! But work is alright when it's fun, it takes the sting out of it.[11]

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[10] Refer back to Maps 2, p. 27, and 3, p. 33, during this section on transporting materials to get an idea of the distance covered.

[11] Rich Fowler, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Photograph 2. A tire being wheeled from a private hiding place in the Inner Harbour Pond neighbourhood up to the Bunker's Hill group collective centre in Ratley Row.

Photograph 3. Some members of the Bunker's Hill group carrying tires from English town up to the collective centre.

That afternoon, once chores and a game of hockey were over, some of the Bunker's Hill children, with family permission, took their fathers' boats out into the harbour to jig up tires from the ocean floor (Photo 4). Altogether, there were three boats with two boys in each. The tires they were jigging for were ones that had been discarded or lost off one of the local fishing boats. The jigging took expertise because the boys were contending with the natural distortions of the clear water as well as the difficulty of trying to hook onto a specific object. During the three or so hours that these mock fishermen were on the water, in spite of the fact that there was also a fair amount of play going on, they did manage to jig up four tires. As each one came up it was tied onto the side of the boat (Photo 5). When the boys had their quota, the jigging session came to an end and the boats motored back to the wharf with prized tires bobbing up and down along the crests of waves formed by the rapid movement of the boats through the water. At the wharf, the tires were hoisted up to Geg and John who had been waiting on the fish plant wharf for the haul. From there the tires were wheeled up the hill to the collective storage place.

By late October the gathering of materials took priority over other activities. Once the boys had asked just about everyone in the vicinity for contributions, they began to go outside of their immediate neighbourhood and community to collect materials. For instance, one

Photograph 4. Three boatloads of youths jigging for tires in Brigus Bay, just off of the fish plant wharf.


25 EVINRUDE

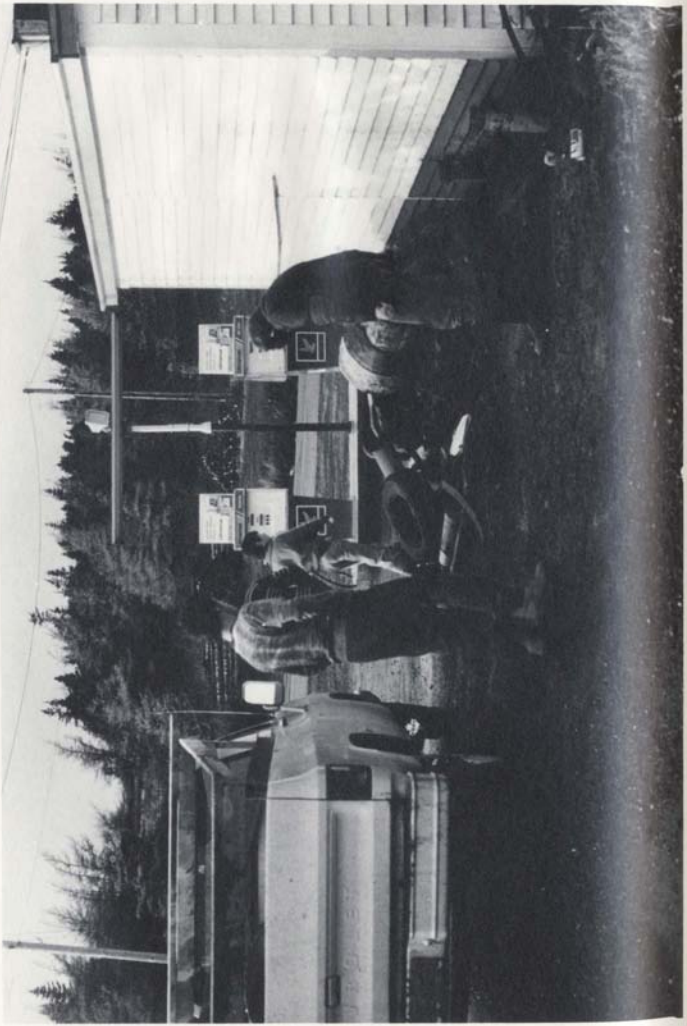
Photograph 5. Two boys hauling up a jigged tire into the boat.

Saturday the boys arranged their family chores and weekend hockey game around a tire-collecting expedition which took them out along the Conception Bay highway past Avondale (see Map 1, p.25). Junior Mercer, one of the oldest members of the Bunker's Hill crowd, had offered to drive some of the group "round the bay"[12] in his pickup to ask for tires from various garages, automobile dumps, and gas stations scattered along the highway. Each of these sites almost always has one or more dilapidated cars decorating its premises.

When he was available to do this, each of the young fellows who planned to go, dropped what he was involved in and headed off with Junior. Four of the Bunker's Hill group, plus myself, took part in the activity. Driving along the highway, it became a game to see who could spot the next wreck first. "There's one, I sees it right up the road," was a frequently shouted exclamation directing Junior to the materials. The excursion lasted approximately three to four hours and we travelled fifty miles each way. Whether there was a car wreck in sight or not, we stopped at every gas station, garage, and dump we saw (Photo 6). In every case the requesting was done by Rodney, Junior's twelve year old brother. Once permission

[12] This is a colloquial term which is often used to refer to travel along the Conception Bay highway. This road hugs the Conception Bay coastline and winds through or nearby all of the communities that are settled along the perimeter (see Map 1, p.25).

Photograph 6. Stopping at a gas station near Holyrood to ask permission to gather up the discarded tires strewn about the premises.



was received, the scene resembled a scavenger hunt to see who could collect the most tires (Photo 7). During that single excursion, well over twenty-five were gathered.

Once our brigade returned to Brigus, we drove up to Ratley Row (see Map 3, p. 33) and stopped in front of the old deserted house that was being used as the group's collection centre. Mr. Sparks, who owns the house and lives in another up behind it, had given the boys previous permission to store their materials in the building. In one way or another, he has always helped the children during bonfire preparations. Until this year he had been commuting to work in St. John's daily, and in the fall would always bring back loads of old tires from town. "I helps in whatever way I can," he told me, "by givin' 'em tires and a safe place from others to keep 'em. You know to help the cause."[13] This attitude is prevalent among the majority of the adults in the community. All of them lend a helping hand in one way or another. Walter Spracklin said, "I always save my old tires, and there's three or four who will be here the next few weeks asking for them, for sure,"[14] and his wife added,

> If a man had a pair of rubbers that was gone beyond, had been patched a dozen times probably, and they couldn't be patched no more, they were laid one side, 'well the boys will be looking

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[13]Albert Sparks, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[14]Walter Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

Photograph 7. A youth wheeling a tire from a dilapidated car found in a dump near Avondale.

> for something for bonfire night we'll lay them one side.' So everybody got in the spirit of it, see, even the parents. They'd save what they could to help the children gather.[15]

When the truck stopped, Rodney jumped out and ran up to the Sparks' house to borrow the key to open the door. When the tires began to be unloaded and wheeled into the house, other boys began to appear on the scene. In no time at all, the transferring of the tires from the truck to the second floor of the house took on the characteristics of an assembly line, tires passing from hand to hand to their final storage destination (Photo 8).[16] Some of the adolescents brought their individual hoards from houses located in the Middle Ridge neighbourhood to the collective storage place at this time. A few transported them by mini bike while others simply wheeled them by hand (Photo 9). By this date (November 1) the second floor of the house was thick with tires (Photo 10). In fact, as the last of the tires from that day's collecting were wheeled into the house, the boys resorted to storing them on the first floor because the second had no more room (Photo 11).

In the midst of all of this diligent work, there was a tremendous amount of "horse play" as well. As tires

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[15] Dulsie Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

[16] See also Photo 1, p. 31, to view the Sparks' house in relation to the rest of the community. The house is to the right of the fish plant.

Photograph 8. Junior and the fellows unloading tires gathered while on a tire-collecting expedition out "round the bay."

Photograph 9. Transporting tires by minibike from Middle Ridge houses to the collective centre in Ratley Row.

Photograph 10. A view of the second floor of the house which served as the Bunker's Hill collective storage space (Photo taken in late October).

Photograph 11. A view of the first floor of the same house (Photo taken in late October).

were passed from person to person, one individual would often become overexuberant and send the tire flying into the air or at an innocent victim. There was also a great deal of pushing and shoving down the inside staircase. Verbal bantering was often aimed at individuals who were not pulling their weight with the work load. Comments such as "If you're not gonna help proper, don't bother to jesus to help at all,"[17] could be overheard from various places in and around the house. While this was going on a number of children accumulated outside of the building. As they stood and observed the spirited endeavour they were periodically set in motion rescuing or dodging out of the way of one of the frequent run-away tires.

On this same day, other groups were involved in similar activity. The Cupids Hill group had received a load of tires from one of the youth's fathers who had picked them up at the garage where he works in Bay Roberts. They unloaded and stored them along the back side of Scott's house in the Main Road neighbourhood. A few of the boys had their own materials. Joseph had wood and tires that he had safely stored in his parents' basement and Jeff had some of the same in a store behind his house.

As the time drew nearer to Bonfire Night and the readily available and donatable materials became more scarce, the adolescents began to scout around the

[17] Geg Hiscock, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

community in small groups and developed schemes to swipe[18] various combustible objects. "You go and ask for it and if they don't give it to you then you take it. Take whatever you can, barrels, tires, mattresses, anything."[19] The closer the day to Bonfire Night, the more daring the gangs became in what they would steal and where they would steal it from. At first they concentrated on easy prey that was out of sight from the owners and neighbours, such as spare tires or firewood piles stored in back yards. But eventually, they graduated to breaking into barns and stores for barrels, disjoining a neighbour's gate, and taking tires off of boats and cars as food for the bonfires. Raiding another group's collection also occurred, and initiated retribution on the part of those swindled.

> Many times one group will steal from another or try to. We'll raid their places where they have their barrels hid. If they raid us one night, on the night after, we'll go back and try to get back what they stole from us, plus a little more.[20]

The boys were often organized in their thievery, planning the thefts well and carrying them through either when the owner was absent from the home or after dark.

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[18] "Swipe" is a colloquial term which is used during this time of year to refer to the action of stealing. The term connotes that the stealing is expected and, to a degree, sanctioned by the community.

[19] Terry, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[20] Blair Mercer, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> You'd be going around in the day time different places and you'd look around to see what's out and around, sort of planning out what you were going to get that night.[21]

Sometimes though, a theft would occur spontaneously. A small group of the larger gang would be out "hanging around" and either spot something and immediately take it if circumstances permitted, or keep the object in mind for later subversive activity.

Some of the Bunker's Hill crowd told me that the third Saturday in October four of them had taken a punt[22] across the bay over to the south side (see Map 3, p.33) to swipe some tires.

> We noted 'em in daylight, see, in front of the stage. We knew we wanted them and waited till the owners were in having their supper meal with the blinds drawn and lamp on. Then we went and took them, no we weren't a bit hesitant. See we had our eye on them for weeks ahead. Just hoping that it wouldn't put in the store before that night so's we could get 'em.[23]

The same Saturday night that the tires were taken from the south side I was with another segment of the Bunker's Hill group in the southwestern portion of English

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[21] Terry, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[22] A local term for a small row-boat.

[23] Walter, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Town.[24] Except for small groups of teenagers scrutinizing the lanes, the community was still, with curtains drawn and soft lights as the only visible evidence of life inside. While we were out "hanging around", someone suggested that we take Mr. Pinkston's barrels. All eight of us headed down the lane to Irish Town and three of the youths ran ahead while the others continued to saunter down the lane and rile one another about girl friends or an embarrassing situation. One of those with us shouted out "They've got 'em" and all of us began to run to meet up with the three who had left us earlier, our excited, high-pitched voices echoing through the lane. When we caught up with them they were on the inside of Mr. Pinkston's fence with three huge wooden barrels at their feet. Immediately, they began to heave the massive barrels over the fence. Members on the outside rolled them across the lane into some nearby bushes for retrieval the next day. The group, continuing their walk together, was periodically interrupted by females or other groups of children walking in the opposite direction. When paths crossed at the intersection by the Anglican church, there was much interchange in the form of playful bantering and poking such as "Hey Ross there's Sheri, she's waitin' on ya." When we reached the centre of the community, we sat

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[24] Refer back to Maps 2, p. 27, and 3, p. 33 during this section on swiping to get an idea of the areas traversed that night.

on the post office steps along the stretch where the neighbourhoods of Riverhead and Irish Town border one another. Some of the boys lit cigarettes while others ran to the corner store for a bag of chips or candy. In the midst of much joking, it was decided that the next place to be hit for bonfire materials would be the local fish plant. Taking a circuitous route down through the Main Road, English Town and Riverhead neighbourhoods, the boys carefully inspected the landscape traversed for "something handy to take for the fire."

Again, some of the group raced on ahead. By the time we reached the fish plant wharf, some of those who had gone in advance were telling us that they had just swiped a tire from a Ratley Row garden. Others at this time were unbolting a huge tire from one of the fish plant's trucks (Photo 12), while still another boy was wheeling away a barrel that had been out by the plant's back door. The agility and expertise with which the thievery was carried through was suggestive of a group of professional larcenists. All of these objects were either carted off to the closest storage place or to a clump of bushes for safekeeping until the next day.

Next, the boys headed down to the end of the wharf to poach some tires from the long liners that were docked there. Just as three of them were about to jump onto one of the boats, voices from below were heard. All of us scattered at the sounds. By the time everyone got back

Photograph 12. Swiping tires from the fish plant grounds one night in late October.

together near Beaver Pond, it was close to eleven p.m. and the drizzle had turned to heavy rain, so all but the die-hards headed for home.

Apparently, more swiping went on up to the very night of the fires, but this was the only night that I personally witnessed it. Also, word had gotten around about who had stolen the huge tire from the fish plant and the youths responsible were made to return that particular one. The boys later told me that the tire was brand new, expensive and difficult to replace, and for those reasons, Mr. Hiscock had pursued the culprits. But from one boy's account, apparently getting caught isn't as tragic as it would seem,

> It's the best part of the bonfire night sure. And it's as much fun to get caught in the act, you almost expect to.[25]

Adults in the community are well aware that this kind of collecting accompanies the more legitimate ones. They accept the activity and rarely seek retribution for materials taken and burned. Rather, beginning in early October, the adult community becomes much more careful of what they leave out in the yard or unlocked.

> It's something to be expected every year. If there is something really valuable that you have, well the talk

[25]Paul Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> goes through the town that they are getting ready for bonfire so you should put away whatever you don't want burned. And everybody in the town knows about it, that's for sure. It's not like stealing. It's for the bonfire so you just take it to burn.[26]

If they are caught unprepared, they consider it their own fault for not having protected it.

> It's people's own fault. Well if they have a barrel out and when the bonfire is coming up, and it is an open thing for the barrels. It was their own fault. If they left the barrel out well the children 'ud have their eye on the barrel, they'd never know who took it. And it was their own fault, because they knowed what was going to happen.[27]

Because the children were not out of school until three-thirty in the afternoon and because they often had family chores or other responsibilities that took up much of their time, the weekdays gave them only limited periods for collecting. The fact that darkness was setting in by around six p.m. also curtailed their weekday collecting ventures. But this lost time was always made up for on the weekends, particularly those directly preceding the night of the bonfire.

The weekend just before November fifth saw a great deal of activity. There were more trips out around the

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[26] George Jerrett, MUNFLA Tape C5026.

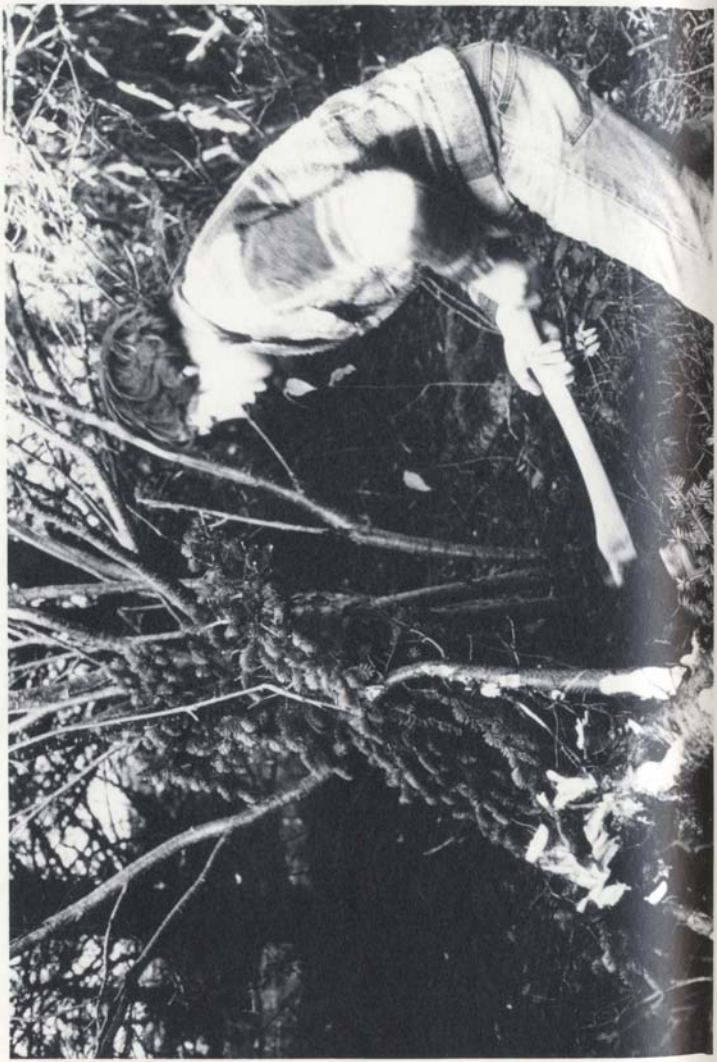
[27] Birdie Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C5027.

bay for tires: Mr. Sparks volunteered his services to the Bunker's Hill group late Sunday afternoon; Ross's father loaned his truck to one of the boys who had a licence; and Junior made another trip out as well.

That Saturday, about ten of the young men from the Bunker's Hill group and myself went out to Molly's Island by boat (see Map 2, p.27) to chop boughs for the fire. We motored out from Inner Harbour Pond soon after mid-day, each boy with his own axe. Once on the island, the boys headed toward the interior and began to chop away at the spruce trees which abound there, most of them second growth (Photo 13). Periodically, one or two of them would climb up to the top of a tree that was being chopped down so that they could topple over with it when it fell. This was considered great fun and a welcome break from the monotony and hard work of chopping.

Once they had collected what they considered to be enough boughs and logs, they began to bundle them up and drag them to the cliff where the boat was moored below (Photo 14). One by one the boughs were thrown to Ross who was stacking them in place on the floor of the boat. Because the logs were quite heavy, they were carried one at a time by two boys to the edge of the cliff, thrown down into the water, eventually to be roped and tied to the rear of the boat and hauled back to the wharf. Once they reached shore, the boys dragged the materials off to the old Sparks' house.

Photograph 13. Chopping spruce boughs for the bonfire out on Molly's Island.



Photograph 14. Dragging the chopped boughs toward the cliff to be heaved into the boat below.

The Sunday before Bonfire Night, I observed the Wilkinson family preparations. In some respects, this family bonfire celebration can be considered atypical. Because the family is British and have lived in Brigus for only five years, the manner in which they celebrate the occasion is heavily influenced by the way it is celebrated in England as Guy Fawkes Day. The Wilkinsons burn an effigy and light fireworks. Before they came to Brigus, no one had ever seen an effigy burned or known of fireworks being lit on this night.

Aside from these differences, their fire is similar to other family fires in the community (Table 1, p.85), in the way it is organized and enacted. Participants in the preparations were one or both of the adults in the family, and the children. The collecting began on the third of November, with the entire family driving down to the Frog Marsh beach (see Map 2, p. 27) to collect driftwood for their fire. In addition to this expedition, the three children gathered driftwood from their own backyard beach and other materials from around the house and yard including two old crates and a barrel. As it was collected it was stored in the family barn directly behind the house.

On the afternoon of the fourth of November, the Wilkinson children, under the direct supervision of their mother, built a "Guy"[28] (Photo 15). His frame consisted of two

[28] See Chapter III for the historical explanation of the use of this effigy.

Photograph 15. The Wilkinson family assembling the "Guy," stuffing him with an old day-bed and giving him a wooden-framed backbone.

pieces of wood nailed together in the form of a cross. Over this was fitted a discarded pair of long johns, into which was stuffed an old daybed's "innards", to fill him out and to give him substance. His head was made of a lady's nylon stocking crammed full of straw. Accessories included unmatching gloves, a pair of beat-up work shoes, a knitted cap, styrofoam eyes, ears and mouth, and a carrot for his nose. All of the children helped in the endeavour and made additions where they saw fit. When completed, the Guy was crammed into the hayloft, banned to the barn until the next evening.

Other family fire preparations in the community involved the adults and the young children of the household as well. The children were usually ten and under, at an age where they were not yet considered independent enough to participate in the neighbourhood-group fires. Together or separately, the adults and children gathered combustible materials, usually the day before or the day of the bonfire. The materials gathered included tires, wood, potato stalks and trash. The manner in which they were accumulated always conformed to the everyday ethics of the community; that is, the materials were obtained legitimately. Basically, the individual familes tended to supply their own materials, gathering them from around the house and yard. Enough materials were gathered to kindle a small-sized fire for an hour or two.

The places chosen for the family bonfire burnings were in close proximity to the house, on some portion of family-owned land such as the vegetable garden plot, backyard, or nearby beach (see Table 1, p. 85; Map 4, p. 87). Safety was the main factor determining where these fires were burned. An open or cleared space was always preferred. On the afternoon of November fifth the father, sometimes with the help of the children, arranged the materials for the bonfire.

The afternoon of November fifth was one of heightened activity for everyone. An occasional adult could be seen going around his yard collecting up sticks, trash and tires, and placing them in a heap in a cleared area, presumably for a family fire. Mr. Wilkinson and two of the children were busy building a teepee-shaped bonfire on their beach, while Mr. Sparks was building his in the backyard. But the most obvious activities were those of the neighbourhood-groups.

As soon as school was out, all of the children raced home, changed clothes, and hurried to their respective storage places. Two of the neighbourhood-groups had their materials transported to the base of their hill by truck: Junior Mercer transferred the Bunker's Hill tires and Joseph's father transferred the Cupids Hill tires. The Clark's Hill group carted their materials by bicycle, foot and pony cart (Photo 16). This was easily done because their hill was much closer to where the materials were stored.

Photograph 16. The Clark's Hill group transporting materials to their bonfire destination (Photo taken in 1977).

From the time that school was dismissed until dark, processions of boys rolling tires and barrels or dragging boughs up the hill (Photos 17 & 18) could be seen in various areas of the community.

> You'd come out of school at 3:30, you wouldn't think of eating. So you'd start lugging your things up the hill, and that would take you two or three hours to get them up. You could hardly believe you could work so hard.[29]

At the Bunker's Hill site, while some members brought the materials up, others were busy building a pyramid out of the tires and sticking wood, trash and boughs into the centres (Photo 19). They took great care in arranging the pyramid, to assure that it was solid and that it was as high as possible while remaining steady. Once it reached an eight-tire height and five-tire radius, additional materials began to be stacked in a reserve heap nearby rather than being added on to the bonfire.

As the sun began to disappear behind the hills, the majority of the group scurried home for quick dinners, while a few remained behind, volunteering to guard the mound against potential thieves. Those who remained began to assemble torches for use later that night to guide members and spectators up the side of the hill in the dark. These torches were made out of old rubber boots, tin cans, or stuffed rags, on the end of a sturdy stick (Photo 20).

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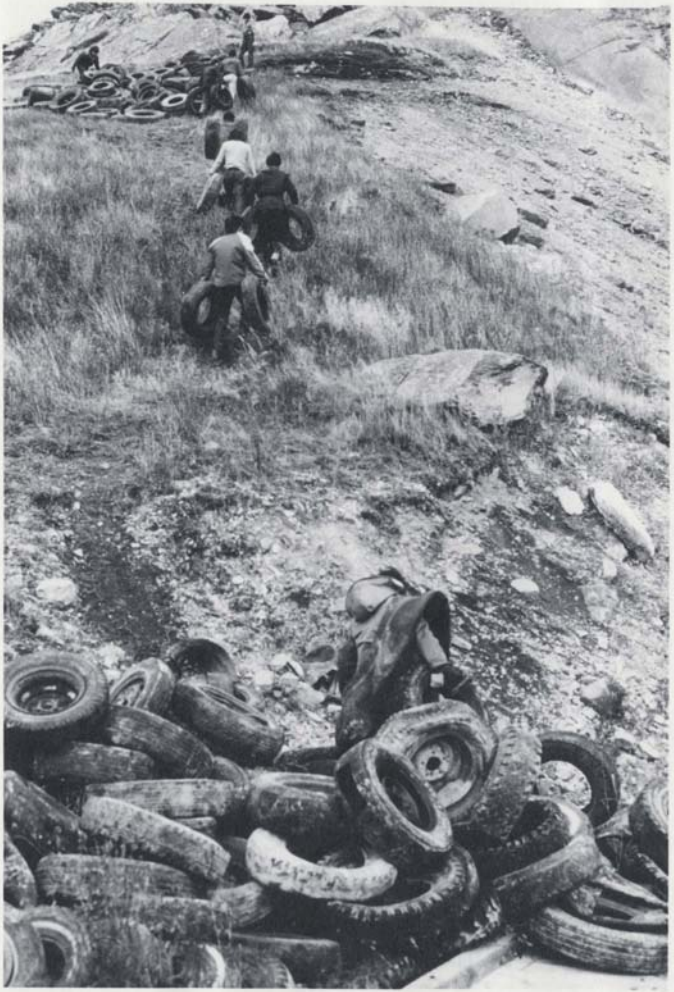
[29] Denis, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Photograph 17. A tire pilgrimage up to the bonfire site on top of Bunker's Hill.



Photograph 18. Youths rolling and carrying tires up to the Bunker's Hill neighbourhood-group bonfire site.

Photograph 19. The Bunker's Hill crowd assembling a pyramid-like structure.

Photograph 20. A young fellow displaying his hand-made torch.

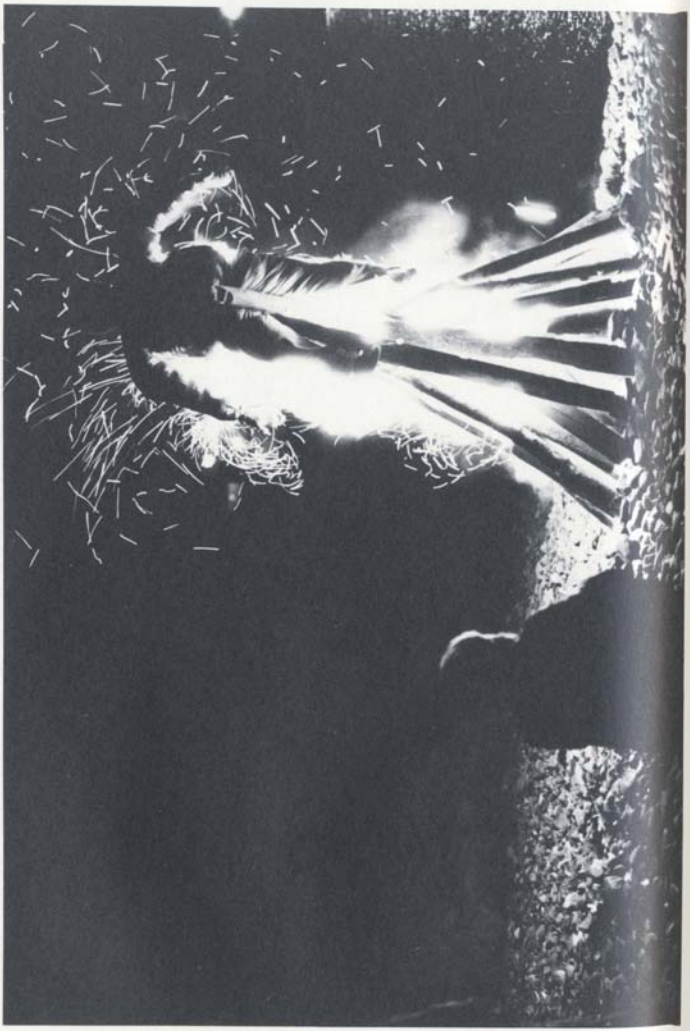
The Bonfire

By around 6:30 p.m., tufts of fire could be seen rising one by one, flecking the darkness like stars. Those first visible were the family bonfires in the dwelling areas.

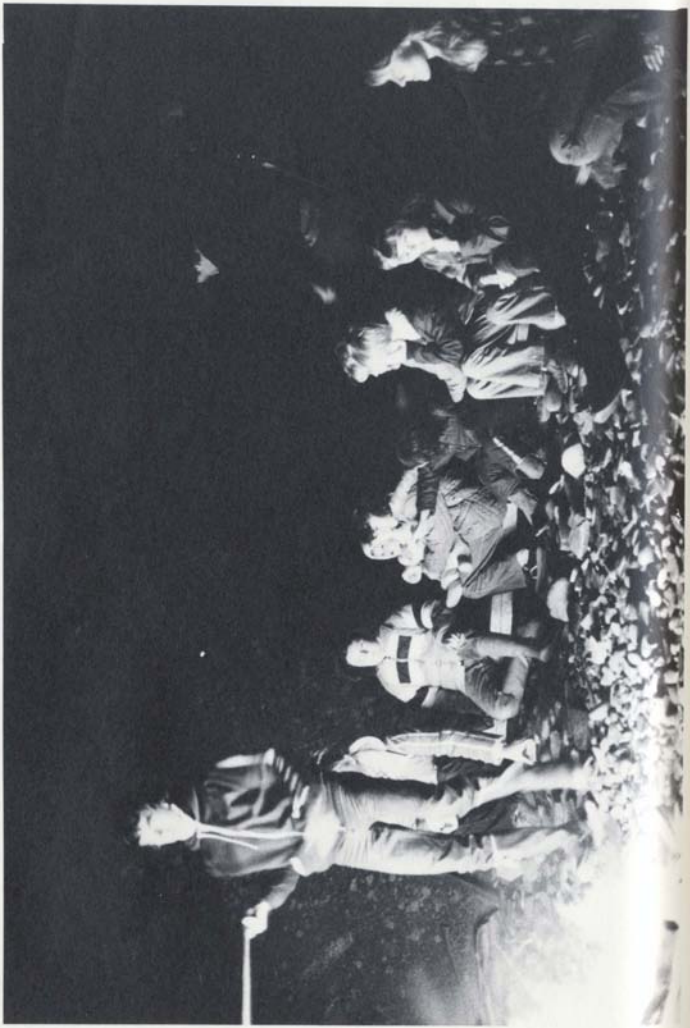
A little before seven p.m., the Wilkinson's placed their Guy on the top of their bonfire teepee. Mr. Wilkinson doused it with kerosene and lit it (Photo 21). Immediately, the teepee was ablaze and the Guy in spot light. While it was burning, members of the family chatted, sat and stared into the fire, and some of the children played around it, throwing sticks and stones at the diminishing Guy (Photo 22). The dominating sounds were those of the fire crackling and the tide lapping up against the pebbled beach. Later in the evening, after the Banks family had joined them, Mr. Wilkinson lit three fireworks that spewed off different colours into the sky. Once the remains of the Guy had crashed down to the ground, Mrs. Wilkinson put wrapped-up fish and potatoes into the embers. At this time, the adults began to drink beer and whiskey while the children drank cokes. This fire ended at around eight p.m.

The other family bonfires ran a similar course, only without the presence of a Guy or fireworks. The family ones, in general, were quite sedate, certainly in comparison to the neighbourhood-group bonfires. The adults managed all of the fire-related activities, while the extent of the children's participation was that they acted as helpers and spectators under the supervision of an adult.

Photograph 21. The Wilkinson family bonfire.



Photograph 22. The Wilkinson family and friends celebrating Bonfire Night.



By around seven p.m., a small signal fire was started at the base of Bunker's Hill and burned for about half an hour, attracting all the members of the Bunker's Hill group as well as a number of spectators. Those with torches lit them, and proceeded up the hill with others trailing behind.

Though there was no obvious person in authority, in an indirect, behind-the-scenes fashion, there was one individual who acted as the organizing force behind each neighbourhood-group fire. For the Bunker's Hill gang this was Junior Mercer. When I asked different members of the group how the leader was chosen, all of them shrugged their shoulders and said "He's the oldest," or "He's the strongest." This individual determined when the fire was to be lit and also when the fire was to be fed or tended to. Junior was, in essence, responsible for the evening's safe development, a kind of overseer for the group, who kept the celebration under control. One of the older community members made this observation, based on the night's events,

> In their own way it was well organized. It wasn't something that you just went up and lit a fire and walked away and left it. It was done, and done properly, and you watched it through and made sure that everything was under control.[30]

[30] Birdie Roberts, Fieldnotes, Summer 1980.

Similar remarks made that night by older members of the community also attested to the fact that the adults realized and accepted the adolescent's role of being "in control".

> I suppose it's the adventure part of it. I suppose, isn't much of an adventure says you. They do something completely on their own. They are the masters of this. And it makes them feel that they are doing something.[31]

Once Junior gave the word, the pyramid was doused with kerosene and one of the lit torches was hurled into it. Immediately the entire heap was ablaze. The fire cast its light onto all of those close by and threw ghoulish shadows as the prevailing northeasterly wind caused the flames to grow and recede. In fact, as the evening wore on, the winds became so strong that the fire gave the impression of burning horizontally rather than vertically (see Photo 25, p.161). The strength of the wind, the intensity of the heat, and the proportion of the flames made it unsafe for anyone but those tending the fire to be near it. Watching the flames soar and change direction unpredictably, one of the bystanders commented,

> You have to wonder someone isn't burned, because with a big fire like that. But you know I don't remember anybody ever got burned and they won't tonight.[32]

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[31]Walter Spracklin, Fieldnotes, Summer 1980.

[32]Walter Spracklin, MUNFLA Tape C5029.

The majority of the crowd situated themselves a little above the fire, sitting on and leaning against the rocks (Photo 23). Throughout the evening, there was a continual flow of people of all ages up and down the hill to view the fire and take part in the celebratory activities. Even families that had had their own family fire came up afterwards to watch the "big one." Adolescent girls began to appear as well. Other spectators included relatives or friends of the various members of the group involved, and those who lived in the Ratley Row and Inner Harbour Pond neighbourhoods.

With the gathering of spectators, and particularly the females, the serious and hushed mood of the crowd shifted to one of playfulness. Activities included passing around Hallowe'en candy; drinking of beer, even by those underage; games of chase around the fire and the throwing of torches into the air; socializing, including the passing of local news and gossip; and reverie.

As more fuel was needed, one or two of the members hurled more materials into the fire. The pyramid-like shape had, by this time, all but disappeared. One of the boys with a long stick in hand, always stayed close by the fire, occasionally poking it, and generally just being there to tend it. Junior was never far away from the centre of the activity, and it was obvious that when something major was done to the fire, it was with his knowledge and approval.

Photograph 23. Beer-drinking onlookers at the Bunker's Hill bonfire. Illuminated across the bay are the lights of Brigus and the Wilkinson and Bishop's Beach family bonfires.

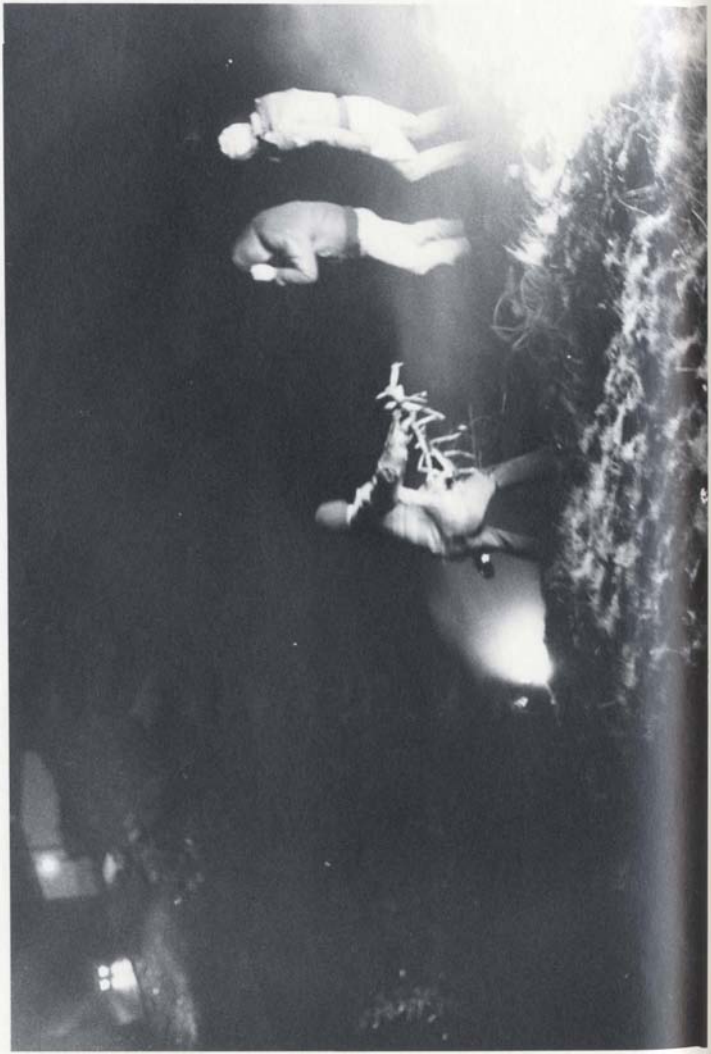
At about nine-thirty p.m., Junior gave the signal to the person tending the fire to fish a tire out of it. The boys speared one and sent the flaming tire plummeting down the side of the hill into the harbour (Photos 24 & 25). This flying-comet spectacle was received with applause and much animated conversation, with remarks such as "Jesus, it looks like a star falling from heaven." The tire-rolling was performed periodically for the next hour, each time producing the same level of enthusiasm. But this, as well as the bonfire itself, was cut short around ten-thirty p.m. by a torrential rain shower which sent everyone home in a hurry and caused the celebration to come to a premature end.

Aftermath

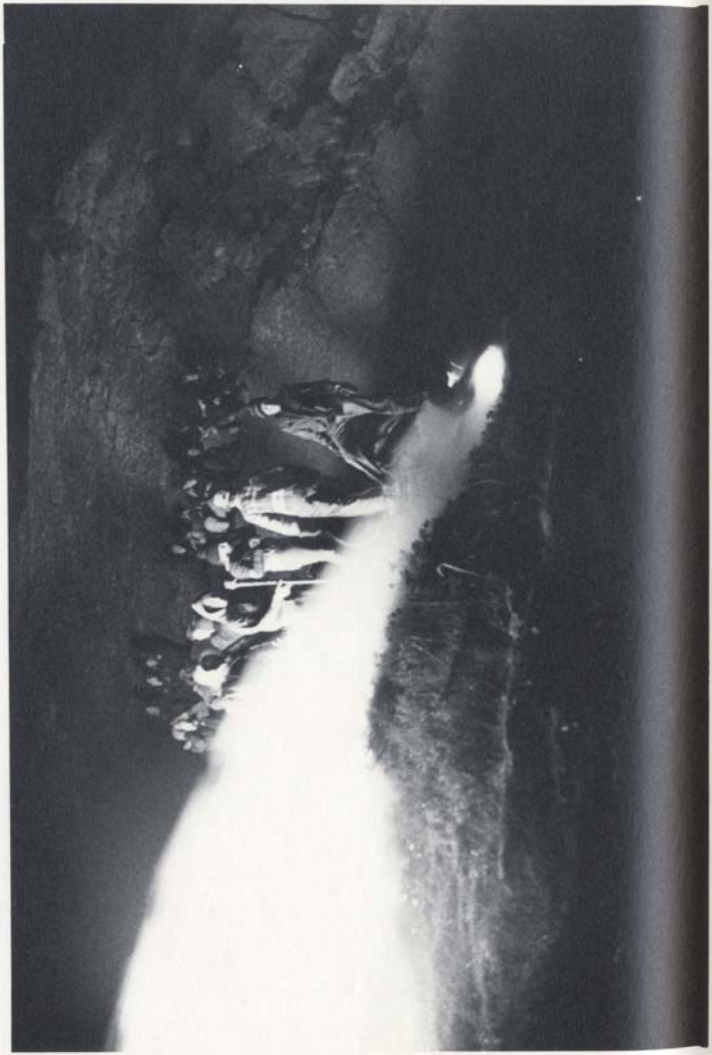
The Bunker's Hill bonfire of 1977, which I also watched, ran its natural course, and what happened that evening is probably what would have occurred at the 1980 celebration.

At the 1977 bonfire, when the spectacular flames began to die and the hour became late, most of the spectators, especially the adults and young children, began to drift home. After the crowd had thinned out and the fire was so low that it was no longer considered dangerous, and as the last of the fuel was disappearing in the flames, some of the boys made a game of jumping over the residue. Others picked up the charred remains and chased one another,

Photograph 24. Fishing a burning tire out of the Bunker's Hill bonfire.



Photograph 25. A burning tire plummeting down the side of Bunker's Hill into the harbour.



trying to blacken their faces. When there were only the burning embers left, Junior and another fellow remained at the site to quench the fire, while the others left to comb the community for possible mischief-making. Reminiscing, an older man described this time of night to me,

> There were other things that went on after the fire, devilment sort of things. Now anything to do with badness, bonfire night you did it. That's when you let off all the steam and when you could stay out as late as you wanted.[33]

Though I did not go with them, the boys told me the next day that, later that night, they had let the air out of the tires of some of the cars they'd passed by, had unhinged a few garden gates, and had stolen garden vegetables for a midnight meal. Some of the underage boys, who had been drinking beer for the first time that night, continued to do so as they travelled the lanes and some of those who had never smoked a cigarette before indulged in that as well. This was also a popular time for courting. Several of the older boys and their girl friends fell behind the pace of the main group and eventually disappeared to the more remote areas of the community.

Gradually, the remaining boys dispersed to their homes, covered with soot, smelling of smoke, and very tired from a day full of intense, exhausting work and play.

[33] Mr. Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

> When you got home you were tired and dirty. You were soot from your head to your feet. And your clothes; well you'd put on old clothes anyway, but your clothes, they'd be all burnt up.[34]

The morning after the 1980 Bonfire Night, a little smoke could be seen filtering up through the half-burned tires at the Bunker's Hill site. But compared to the thick haze that had pervaded the area after the 1977 bonfire, it was miniscule (Photo 26).

Nonetheless, the disappointment of the celebration's quick termination the night before was well forgotten by morning. The next few days the lanes of the community and the school yards at recess were battle grounds of raised voices, each child proclaiming that his fire had been the biggest, had had the most tires, or had burned the longest. Declarations such as "We had four hundred tires, bet you didn't have near that many," resounded everywhere. Remarking on the aftermath of Bonfire Night, one of the older boys exclaimed,

> It's great talk the next day. You'd say 'We had a better fire than you did.' You'd compare. You always have a little bit of a thing between this group and that group.[35]

From this description, it is readily apparent that the Bonfire Night celebration is still a very special time of

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[34] Terry, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[35] Paul Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

Photograph 26. The blackened area (see upper left corner of photograph) indicates charred remains of the previous night's bonfire on Bunker's Hill. View shows face of the hill down which tires were rolled.

year in Brigus, particularly for the adolescents. "It's the best bit of fun you get in the fall,"[36] was a remark often made to me. As well as being a "bit of fun", the celebration is obviously something more than that. Although Birdie Roberts was probably referring to its historical background when he said, "They're still keeping it up, and lots don't know what's on the back of this, the bonfire,"[37] he could just as easily have been suggesting that there is a more complex reason for the celebration's retention, that it has a contemporary significance for those involved which reaches beyond its traditional meanings. This aspect of the celebration will be explored in the following chapter.

[36] Paul Kennedy, Fieldnotes, Fall 1980.

[37] Birdie Roberts, MUNFLA Tape C5027.

CHAPTER V

THE BONFIRE CELEBRATION AS AN ENACTMENT OF COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDHOOD

Assessing the bonfire celebration for its contemporary significance, it becomes obvious that as man has become more sophisticated in his understanding of the natural environment and his relationship to it in the universe, Frazer's theories alone can no longer explain the festival's present day persistence and continued enthusiasm. In Cooperation and Change Ward Goodenough states:

> . . . as circumstances alter the intensity of people's wants, change the nature of their emotional conflicts, or provide new channels for dealing with them, the meaning and value of their established customs and beliefs also change.[1]

Therefore, this celebration can be further explained and better understood by integrating Frazer's theories of origin with more recent communication and symbolic theories, which interpret such events in terms of their contemporary contextual significance.

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[1] Ward Goodenough, Cooperation in Change (New York: John Wiley, 1966), p. 140.

Modern folklorists and anthropologists are now in the process of redefining their approaches to the expressive dimensions of man, and are realizing the necessity of investigating these dimensions through a more holistic perspective by viewing them in relation to other vital aspects of the community or group under study. They are beginning to look at customs and beliefs, not in and of themselves, but as they relate to and interconnect with other parts of the culture.[1] In The Ritual Process, Victor Turner talks of beliefs and practices as being

> . . . something more than 'grotesque' reflections or expressions of economic, political, and social relationships; rather they are coming to be seen as decisive keys to the understanding of how people think and feel about these relationships, and about the natural and social environment in which they operate.[2]

In his article "Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore," Roger Abrahams pursues a similar train of thought and develops a theory of "enactment" by which to view such phenomena. Explaining his use of the term, Abrahams defines enactment as,

> . . . any cultural event in which community members come together to participate, employ, the deepest and most complex

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[2] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 6.

> multivocal and polyvalent signs and symbols of their repertoire of expressions. . .[3]

and goes on to describe them as statements of community and culture, through which their meaning cannot be recognized without ". . . attending to larger socio-cultural matrices by which these events come to be and to signify."[4]

Abrahams extends his argument by suggesting that there is both a strong continuity and dialectic between a community's everyday activities and those intense events he calls enactments.

> It is in the everyday acts, I think, that intense enactments find their greatest fund of energies and shared values -- in the scenes and expectations from one domain of life as they are reframed, inverted and reenacted within another more self-conscious and openly reflexive realm. This domain may be regarded as a 'play world' but it shares high seriousness with the manners and other systems by which we engage in life. And it draws upon these orders, whether in performance or ritual, if only to abrogate them, thus creating an energy source and a common means of focusing their energies.[5]

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[3] Roger D. Abrahams, "Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore," In Frontiers in Folklore, ed. William Bascom (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1978), p. 79.

[4] Abrahams, "Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory," p. 79.

[5] Abrahams, "Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory," p. 79.

What I propose to do here is to utilize Abrahams' concepts and explore the correspondence between the bonfire celebration, its adjacent features, and everyday attitudes toward childhood in Brigus. I will discuss the manner in which this particular celebration displays multiple levels of symbolic meaning for members of the community, through the intensification, inversion, and recoding of everyday life.

Drawing from Abrahams' theory, the Brigus bonfire celebration can be viewed as an enactment, expressing normalized and idealized interactional encounters centring upon two stages of childhood, early childhood and adolescence. The community's pervasive values toward these two stages are encapsulated and commented upon within each of the respective bonfire event structures, the family and the neighbourhood-group. Both of these in turn, are part of a larger whole which the people of Brigus refer to as the bonfire celebration. It is this whole that I will look at first.

The entire celebration is framed both in time and space. The time, extending from the beginning of the preparations through the aftermath of the fire, is specially sanctioned and conventionally set apart by the community. During this period the children are allowed to follow a certain course of action of which the entire community is aware; for everyone in Brigus knows that "come October, preparations for Bonfire Night begin." They also

know that November fifth will always give witness to a number of bonfires in the area.

Spatially this celebration is framed as well. There are specifically designated places for the bonfires, the majority of which are located either on a high promontory, as in the case of the neighbourhood-group fires; or in a space close to the home, for the family fires. The use of space during this period is vastly different between the two types of groups, and this will be further explored later in the chapter.

This stylized framing takes the celebration out of the realm of everyday life, yet at the same time it epitomizes the everyday. Through the creation of a play world ". . . very much like the real world but psychologically (and often physically) removed from it in time and space,"[6] the children's activities sometimes give the impression of chaos and upendedness. Yet they also display regulated and predictable behavior. "If these enactments make us dizzy, they also produce a sense of abundant life and personal and social control."[7] In Rituals in Culture, Abrahams states that ". . . man's rage for order is

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[6]Abrahams, "Complex Relations of Simple Forms," in Folklore Genres, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 202.

[7]Abrahams, "Towards an Enactment-Centered Theory," p. 106.

paralleled by his constant flirtation with disorder."[8] These two seeming contradictions, found simultaneously and alternatingly juxtaposed in the bonfire celebration, will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter.

At this point I will turn to the two smaller structures existing within the general celebratory context, the family and the neighbourhood-group events. Within each of these I have made further divisions, delineating six basic elements common to both: Physio-spatial location of the fire; socio-spatial location of the fire; means of collecting materials; use of a potentially dangerous natural element; participation; and representation of everyday norms and ideals (Figures I and II). I will begin by introducing the two events generally. From there I will go on to describe each element as it is expressed in both events. During this time I will also discuss the pervasive values and attitudes toward the two different stages of childhood rendered in each event.

In everyday life there is a distinction between the way young children and adolescents are treated and acknowledged by the community. This is expressed within the celebratory context where the two different configurations, the family and the neighbourhood-group events, display such vastly different orientations of movement.

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[8] Abrahams, Rituals in Culture, Folklore Reprint Series, 5, No. 1 (Bloomington: Folklore Publications Group, 1977), p. 13.

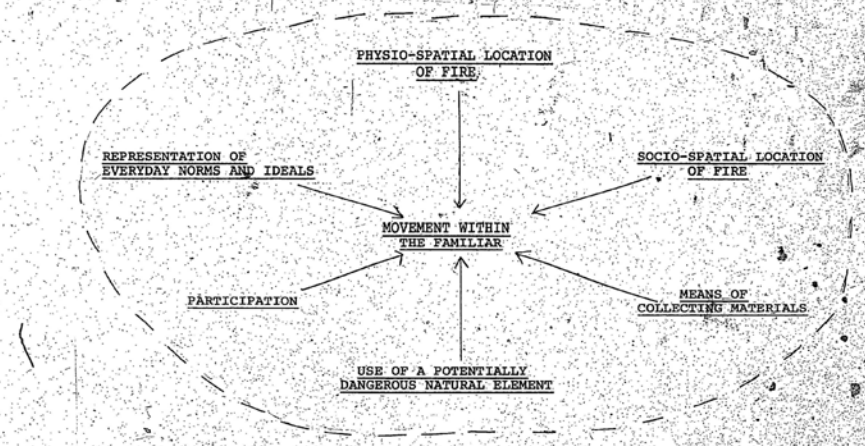

Figure 1. A Schematic representation of the symbolic movement expressed in the family bonfire events.

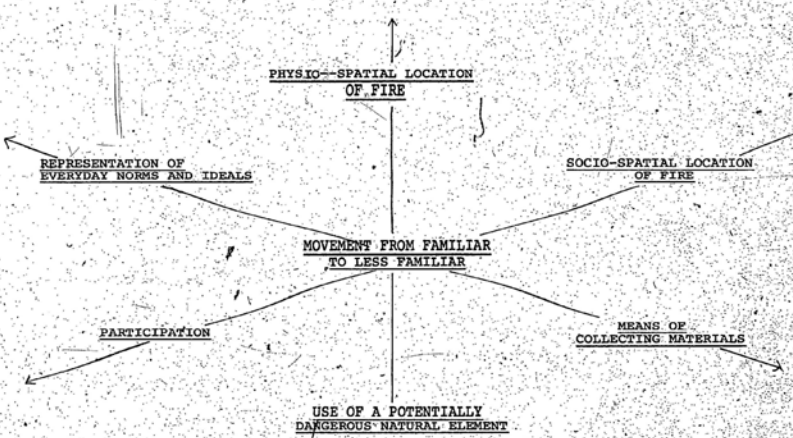

Figure II. A schematic representation of the symbolic movement expressed in the neighbourhood-group bonfire events.

Within the celebratory context the movement characteristic of each event conforms to that of the respective childhood experience--only here it may be intensified and formalized, or exaggerated and inverted because it is in the framework of a "time out of time." Discussing the otherwordly quality of festivals Abrahams calls it "making strange."

> There are two ways of making-strange: intensification and formalization, or by inversion. The former stylizes the serious dimensions of everyday behaviors; the later selectively upends the serious goal-oriented or teleological patterns. The serious apparently serves social order, the ludic comments upon society and its orders, and not always very kindly.[9]

Figure I is a schematic representation of the symbolic movement expressed in the family bonfire events. These are semi-private celebrations in which the movement is within highly familiar, intimate realms, and is inward-directed. They are formal and relatively self-contained, for the preparations and the burning almost always involve the immediate family to the exclusion of the rest of the community except insofar as they can view it because it is outdoors in the open air. The behaviour is regulated and there is an all-pervading sense of composure. It can be seen as an example of the maintenance of the status quo, so to speak; a mirrored representation of what early childhood is like in everyday Brigus life.

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[9] Abrahams, Rituals in Culture, p. 24.

In the everyday world young children are closely watched because of the several natural dangers in the Brigus vicinity such as the bordering sea, slippery and unsteady rocks, the woods, and the barrens and bogs. Each of these is a very real potential threat, especially a natural element like the sea, which though it has provided many Brigus families with their main means of support, has also been the cause of much material destruction and human death. This reality coupled with the fact that the majority of the children do not know how to swim, give adults reason to keep close watch of their young. In fact, most children are either kept indoors or within the immediate fenced yard where they can be observed and supervised by adults, or older brothers and sisters. If they travel beyond their own yard it is always in the company of an older relative. Also, the majority of their contact in the early years is with their immediate family and nearby neighbours.

Figure II is a schematic representation of the symbolic movement expressed in the neighbourhood-group bonfire events. If the family fire events exude a sense of maintenance, these public displays are an outward-directed experiential exploration of the adolescent's natural and socio-cultural environment. This movement is from the familiar to the less familiar and unfamiliar realms of the community; a kind of spatial and cognitive reaching out. This is a time when the adolescents hold the stage and the rest of the community members are compelled to

acknowledge their presence. This occupancy by its very nature includes elements of "sense" and "nonsense."[10] The commingling of the two at this time ". . . involves both a courtship and an argument, and often simultaneously. It asks for communion while it invokes personal and socio-cultural threat."[11] Therefore, these fire events display licentious behaviour side by side with highly regulated and predictable behaviour.

But this is because adolescence in everyday life is a time when the young are given a certain amount of limited freedom to ". . . 'strut and a stare and a' that."[12] In a period of life where they are no longer children and yet not quite adults, these adolescents have the option of drifting interchangeably from one role to another. During this age-range they can transcend idealized structural limitations, play with concepts, the natural environment, and social relationships because they are no longer under the constant supervision of their elders and not yet considered fully responsible beings by the adult community. Yet this period of "betwixt and between" is of necessity a time for exploration of the natural and socio-cultural

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[10] These terms are borrowed from Abrahams and Richard Bauman, "Sense and Nonsense in St. Vicent," American Anthropologist 73(1971), 762-72, in which they use them in relation to acceptable and unacceptable behaviours on the island.

[11] Abrahams, "Toward and Enactment-Centered Theory," p. 106.

[12] Turner, The Ritual Process, p. 201.

environment of which they will soon be required to have a keen knowledge.

During the time that I spent in Brigus I witnessed a definite division of activity between the male and female adolescents. In the daytime the females were rarely seen outdoors, and when they were it was usually on an errand for their mother, out walking someone's baby, or close to the house playing jump rope or hop scotch. More frequently they were seen indoors taking care of a younger sibling or helping mother with the domestic chores.

Much more obvious in their presence were the male adolescents. They gave the illusion of being everywhere all of the time. If they were not on their bikes zooming through the narrow lanes, they were usually bordering the fish plant wharf observing the fishermen cleaning their day's catch, or trying a hand at fishing themselves. Another heavily frequented place for the boys was down by Bishop's beach where plenty of sculpin and flat fish could be caught and dissected. In addition to fishing, other favourite pastimes for the boys included excursions up to the woods, and helping father out with basic chores such as salting the fish, or hauling wood. The adolescents' exploration of their environment involves testing it to its limits. This is exhibited in the "serious play" that is carried on within the celebratory context, where the activities become unreal and yet more real at the same time.

> Unreal because of the felt departure from the ordinary toward the more heightened, selfconscious and stylized behaviors of named and framed activities-in-common: more real because the events take on the motives and scenes of everyday and bring them into some new perspective allowing us to see them as part of some larger patterns of existence.[13]

Therefore the family events intensify much of everyday life, while the neighbourhood-group events upend as well as intensify.

Physio-Spatial Location of the Fire

The physio-spatial location of the family fire is on level ground, and privately owned and cultivated land. All of these characteristics reinforce basic values related to early child rearing. The fire is almost always within the confines of the yard. The ground here is usually level and clear of debris, so a child is less likely to stumble and fall there than on more rocky or sloped land that is outside of the yard. Additionally, the fact that it is privately owned and cultivated land makes it familiar to child and adult, cutting down on the possibility of unpredictable occurrences.

The physio-spatial location of the neighbourhood-group fire is always on a high hill where it is conspicuous and visible to the entire community. This physical space gives

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[13] Abrahams, "Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory," pp. 80-81.

a sense of expanse, both outward and upward. It is also uncultivated and publicly traversed land, connoting movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and from the specific to the general. The adolescents are in a period of life where they are reaching outside of the cultivated and ordered home environment toward unworked and more extensive environs.

Socio-Spatial Location of the Fire

Closely related to the physical location of the fires are the socio-spatial locations. The family fire is always in the immediate vicinity of the home which is sponsoring it; usually in the backyard vegetable garden or another close area near the house. In the larger context, this spot is within the community proper, the cultural environment, and a highly familiar place to all of those partaking. These areas are traversed daily by the family and in many cases there are obvious signs of human activity. These places are cultivated with flowers and vegetables, the lawns are manicured, clothes are hung on the lines, and fish are drying upon platforms within the yards. These are all spaces that are culturally and visually altered and therefore "lived-in."[14] In addition these spaces are

[14] My thoughts concerning concepts of usage of natural and cultural spaces have been influenced by Gerald Pocius, "Calvert: A Study of Artifacts and Spatial Usage in a Newfoundland Community," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1979.

located within cognitively designated "neighbourhoods"--boundaried spaces.

In comparison, the adolescents' fires are outside of the immediate community proper and the familiar cultural environment. They edge toward the unfamiliar, natural landscape. Staged on rocky barren cliffs, these are uncultivated, "wild" territories, where people occasionally pass through on their way to pick berries, chop wood, or go hunting. These are beyond the well-traversed and named zones of the townscape, reaching into the unknown, neutral, and ambiguous areas. Though there is a name for each of the hills where these fires burn, these are not nearly so boundaried as the spaces within the community proper. They are less clearly designated than the neighbourhoods and the family yards.

Means of Collecting Materials

Within the family bonfire event, the means of collecting materials also points toward the familiar. It is always done legitimately, and usually supplies are gotten from the family's personal stock or a near-by neighbour's. If the collecting is done further away from the home, it always includes at least one adult as well as the children. For example, when the Wilkinson family went down to the beach the parents oversaw the activities. The children were not allowed to go on their own.

On the other hand, the youths involved in the group events have two methods of collecting materials: by legitimately asking for donations, and by illegitimately swiping things. Whichever means they use, as the gathering progresses it moves from the highly familiar areas of their own homes and those of their immediate neighbours; to the general community; to the regional businesses such as the gas stations and dumps that were scoured by the Bunker's Hill group; to the less familiar natural surroundings such as Molly's Island and the woods out past Frog Marsh where the boys cut boughs, or the harbour in which they jigged tires from the ocean floor. In addition, there is also a great deal of movement when the boys go out swiping. This was exemplified during the night that I took part in the thievery. The boys traversed every neighbourhood in town during that night, weaving in and out of the narrow lanes and through back yards and fields.

Use of a Potentially Dangerous Natural Element

Fire, which is such a prominent feature of the celebration, is used in two quite different capacities in each event. Practically speaking, the fire is a means by which a good portion of the rubbish of the community can be gotten rid of. In effect, the fire can be seen as physically purifying the town of useless accumulated materials such as old discarded tires, broken fences, old boots, garbage, and others. More than once while I was in Brigus

I heard comments such as "It's a darn shame that the bodies of those old wrecks don't burn. Because then they could be burned-up on Bonfire Night along with all the other rubbish."

At the family bonfire event the use of the potentially dangerous natural element is exercised with great reverence and care. The element is kept in its proper niche during the entire burning. It is also under constant surveillance by the father. He takes full control and responsibility for lighting it, tending it, and extinguishing it, while the children sit and admire it or "help out" under close supervision. The children's lack of involvement is due to the fact that they are not considered old enough to responsibly look after themselves. As in the case of protecting them from everyday risks and hazzards, the parents also shelter them from the dangers of the fire. Metaphorically these fires can be seen as outdoor hearth fires, representing the concept of familial continuity.

At the neighbourhood-group events the boys have full reign with fire. The use of fire and particularly the control of it, displays the boys' developing mastery over a potentially dangerous natural element. It can destroy unless placed in the confines of a cleared or protected area. By placing it thus, as well as being careful and attentive, the adolescents exhibit a sense of competence and responsibility. Within this context they also play with the element and test it to its extremes. The boys

often throw their lighted brands up into the air, over the cliff into the sea, or whirl them around in the air trying to extinguish them. They also fish flaming tires out of the blaze and guide them down the side of the hill into the sea below. Rather than letting the fire burn on its own and be admired from afar, as with the family fires, much of the reason for having the larger fires is so that the boys can play with it once it is lit. They take fire out of fire, separating and dissecting it, to explore all of its possibilities. The tires rolling down the side of the hill can be seen as the ultimate in outward movement from the focal point of the fire.

"Playing with fire" can be seen as an intensification of their everyday activities. It is a metaphor for adolescence generally, and their part in the overall celebration specifically. Referring to my discussion of fire as a metaphor in Chapter III, it becomes readily apparent that its physical properties are similar to many of the characteristics of adolescence, and especially those that are enacted within the celebratory context. For example, the ability of fire to destroy is analogous to the fact that adolescents are a potential threat as well. As the children get older their personalities become more forceful, they begin to exercise a degree of independence, and question authority. This is exhibited in the inverting of the idealized norm of honest, when the boys swipe materials for the fire.

The ability of fire to change form and yet to remain the same is analogous to the stage of life that the adolescent is going through. As I discussed earlier, he is neither child nor adult, and yet he has the freedom during this stage of life to play with both. As the shifting of the fire on Bunker's Hill was unpredictable, so too is the action of the adolescent.

Like the powerful presence of fire, this period of childhood also commands attention. The children are often loud in the evenings, as they play throughout the lanes. They test authority in various ways such as by gunning their cars and speeding them along the roads or taking apples from private orchards. This testing extends into the celebratory context when they swipe and when they cavort on Bonfire Night.

Fire is also a metaphor for sexuality, and this characteristic is everpresent in adolescence. It is a period of life when the young are becoming sexually mature. The opposite sex is a continual topic of conversation. A sharp division between the sexes in the work and play activities of everyday life is prevalent at this time. The boys' interests often mirror the work activities of their fathers, such as manual labour chores like cutting and hauling wood, building, and fishing; while the girls are much more involved in the domestic realms, indoors helping mother with household responsibilities or baby-sitting. Yet the males and females do get together for

social activities, setting up places of rendevous such as the local fish and chips drive-in or the steps of one of the confectionaries.

These roles and attitudes are enacted in the celebratory context as well. The preparatory stages involve a large degree of manual labour and this is carried out only by the boys. Girls don't appear on the scene at all until the actual bonfire lighting, taking part initially as spectators, and later as partners in after-hour courting.

Participation

Participation in the family fire events involves small numbers of people, and primarily only members of the immediate family, although occasionally there are two households involved. When this occurs, it is with families that are "close" in everyday life. The active participants, those directly involved in the activities, are the adults. They supervise the celebration and the activities of the children. The small size of the group and the presence of adult supervision reinforce the sense of familiarity and parental authority with which the young child is always surrounded.

Those participating in the neighbourhood-group events include many people on different levels. The boys are by far the most active participants. These include boys from different families throughout a neighbourhood, or adjoining

ones. This inclusion reaches far beyond the individual family and also through a relatively wide age-group, for those actively involved range from ten to twenty. Others involved, though in a much more passive way, include adults who donate materials or give a helping hand; and other community members who show up at the bonfire as spectators. So, compared to the family events, the participants for these fires cover a much wider spectrum of people, and a much larger number as well.

Representation of Everyday Norms and Ideals

In their representation of everyday norms and ideals, the family bonfire events can be seen as an intensification and maintenance of these. As in their daily lives, during this time the young children are closely supervised, protected from potential dangers, and kept close to the centre of the family. Their physical and cognitive movement is limited and inward-directed rather than outward.

Norms and ideals in the adolescent events are inverted as well as intensified. There is a simultaneous identification with the real social world at this time and a distancing from it. They take control of the natural and social environment during this period. Most apparent is the exaggerated negation or parody of typical interpersonal encounters. But, as well as this, all of the activities involve a high degree of intensification.

For example, in everyday life the adolescents' pastimes as well as their "chores" replicate much of the male adult activity that goes on around them, for they identify strongly with their fathers and attempt to help in every part of male activity. They test their physical strength and male prowess through involvement in these "feats of strength." Not a day goes by in the summer months that there isn't a large gathering of boys along the shore line preoccupied with one style of fishing or another, challenging one another to see who can catch the most. If they are not involved in that then they are usually up in the woods exploring or scouting around for such things as gull eggs.

Within the framework of the celebration the boys' activities demonstrate their growing knowledge of technical skills involved with the sea and woods that will in later life be used in a more serious manner rather than in the playful leisure activity of the present time. This activity also reflects their developing understanding of subtle social standards that will be important assets once they become incorporated into the community as adults. These include a sense of cooperation, responsibility, organization and competence. All of these elements are evident in the different phases of preparation as well as the actual bonfire burning.

The sense of responsibility is evident in many areas. On the day of the celebration the boys take turns acting

as guards over the prepared pyramid-like structure, and during the actual burning certain fellows take on the responsibility of looking after and feeding the fire. In addition, when the fire dies down one or two of the boys will stay behind to make sure the fire is out to the extent that it is no longer a potential threat to the community.

Technical expertise and competence is exhibited in the act of building a sound structure out of tires and other materials; chopping the spruce trees, which requires strength and agility; and jigging for tires, which demonstrates the boys' developing mastery of the use of a boat, a method of fishing which requires coordination and balance, and knowledge of the "moods of the sea."

The features of cooperation and organization reveal themselves in the fraternized collecting ventures, for much of the collecting is done in groups and is organized. When they went out to Molly's Island the boys got together to decide which family boat was large enough to take all of them, so that only one trip to the island would be necessary; and once all of the boughs and wood were cut, it became a collaborative effort to get the timber off the island and up to the storage place. In addition, the trip out around the bay also involved a confederation of bodies; and certainly the lugging of the material up to the hill on the afternoon of the fifth displayed an understanding of cooperation and organization principles as well.

During this time of year the antics are sanctioned, whereas even though they may find vent during other times of the year, this period allows them the freedom to explode. Within the celebratory context the inversion of idealized norms exists simultaneously or alternatingly with serious motives. Discussing inversion Barbara Babcock states:

> . . . framed disorder in the form of aesthetic negation is 'variability training,' 'rehearsal for those real situations in which it is vital for our survival to endure cognitive disorientation so that a real and significant problem may emerge.'[15]

The adolescents stretch and invert rules by taking on characteristics of the adult community. ". . . players have access to roles denied them in real life . . . and play them to the limit and sometimes beyond."[16] The boys also invert social norms, ". . . categories (social and otherwise) are purposely confused or orders upended in an environment of total burlesque."[17]

Many of the behaviours exhibited and sanctioned during this time are considered inappropriate in everyday life, in spite of the fact that they exist then as well. Remarking on this type of symbolic inversion, Abrahams and

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[15]Barbara Badcock, Intro., The Reversible World, ed. Barbara Badcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 20.

[16]Abrahams, Rituals in Culture, p. 37.

[17]Abrahams, Rituals in Culture, p. 37.

Bauman state that those

> . . . engaged in the inversive and licentious behaviors during the festival events were often involved in and even noted for activities which had much in common with their festival behavior.[18]

Thus, the children stay out extra late on November fifth, much later than they would be allowed to under normal circumstances. They do not ask permission to remain out, they simply take it upon themselves to make the evening's rules, and return home when they want.

The adults have no active hand in any of the celebrations. They are simply passive spectators. Rather, it is the children who step to the forefront and implement and supervise all action. The adolescents, the structurally inferior at this time, are transformed to the structurally superior; while the normally structurally superior, the adults, are cast down to a temporary position of underling.

There is a great deal of underage drinking and cigarette smoking, both typical everyday adult activities. There is also an overall sense of lack of restraint during this period. The boys play with fire, they stay out late, they drink, they carouse, and they steal. In everyday life, ideally people have respect for one another's

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[18] Abrahams and Richard Bauman, "Ranges of Festival Behavior," in The Reversible World, ed. Barbara Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 195.

property, while in the celebratory context anything that is available is taken. But this too has its purposes. Not only does it minister to the immediate desire for materials, but it also serves as a means by which the boys test the community's sense of preparedness. In Private Cultures and Public Imagery, John Szwed discusses the Newfoundlander's attitude toward preparedness and unpreparedness, which is typical for Brigus as well.

> In the child's early experience he learns to be at once cautious about being 'taken in,' and used by others, and at the same time aware that it is to be expected that human beings should deceive some of the time.[19]

So, by displaying their ability to catch people unaware, but at the same time using it in its exaggerated form in a framed context, the adolescents are experiencing "variability training" and are expressing their knowledge and implication of the concepts of preparedness and unpreparedness. Not only do they enjoy catching the adult community unaware but they also delight in catching other neighbourhood-groups off guard. Many of the boys have often remarked that the best part of the celebration is the swiping. They also admit that being "found out" is great fun and almost expected. They are learning, in an

[19] John Szwed, Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies, No. 2 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1966), p. 81.

experiential environment, about unexpected occurrences and changes in their total environment, which they will need to be aware of once they cross the bridge into adulthood. In effect, they are learning the "tricks of the trade" of outport life.

The concept of the adolescent as a "non-person" in everyday life is an important one to grasp in order to understand the sanctioning and acceptance of inversions during the celebration. Explaining the concept Szwed states, "Children being without fully developed selves, are free to observe and report what has been observed. They are particularly free to go where adults fear to tread."[20] Bearing this attitude in mind it is easily understandable how at this time particularly the boys are free to stretch their limits; and in the process, disrupt authority. Essentially they are reporting, by way of the celebratory activities, their observations of their natural and socio-cultural environment.

Also evident within the celebratory context is the fact that the adolescents participate in such a way that each pulls his own weight. This reflects the existing social structure. The indirect and unspoken leadership of the individual in charge of the celebration expresses the same. This individual is present to simply guide the actions along and be there in case something disastrous

[20] Szwed, Private Cultures, p. 100.

were to happen that would need immediate decisions. James Faris documents this common Newfoundland attitude stating that egalitarianism is often stressed and that when there is a leader, his authority is indirect and rarely imposed.[21]

[21] James Faris, Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies, No. 3 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972), p. 211.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

To fully understand the meaning of the Brigus bonfire celebration, one must necessarily pursue the answers to fundamental questions that are raised by the existence of such a custom. For instance, from where did the celebration come? Why is it celebrated when it is? And, why does it have the characteristics that it does?

In an effort to answer such questions and to determine the integrity of the Brigus bonfire celebration, I have examined a combination of factors which I feel help to explain its present-day manifestation. Therefore, not only do I look at its contemporary enactment, but also at its historical antecedents and the community setting in which it occurs.

Arguing the importance of understanding the origins of a tradition in order to fully comprehend its present-day meaning, Henry Glassie states,

> All things are expressions of ideas held in the minds of their makers, and these ideas are formed out of other necessarily older ideas. . . . All things are, in a way, survivals of earlier things.[1]

[1] Henry Glassie, All Silver and No Brass (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 57.

Parallels to the bonfire celebration reach far back in time. Though earliest man utilized fire in a serious attempt to influence his natural and supernatural environment, gradually the ceremonial and religious overtones receded to the background and the fire festivals took on a more secular nature, expressing themselves in the form of celebrations such as Hallowe'en, Guy Fawkes day and, most recently, Bonfire Night.

Looking at all of these festivals, it is readily apparent that they exhibit one common characteristic which has such a deep and all-pervasive identification, that it has survived, through transference, even when other characteristics of the custom have died out. This characteristic is the presence of fire as a prominent feature of the celebration.

The questions regarding why fire has been used and why it has been a prominent feature of these celebrations through time, can partially be answered by a close look at the element itself. The obvious attractive qualities of fire are physical--a source of light and heat. But I would argue that it is a combination of the physical and the metaphorical qualities which explain its presence. Fire has a wide range of metaphorical usages and, therefore, can appeal to a variety of wants and needs. It is this ability which helps to explain its persistence through time, and its contemporary manifestation in the Brigus bonfire celebration. In this particular enactment,

fire serves as a metaphor for concerns of early childhood and adolescence. In addition it functions physically both to dispose of unwanted wastes that have accumulated around the community throughout the year, and to draw large numbers of the community together in celebration. Therefore, this enactment can appeal to the majority of the community on a number of levels.

In an attempt to place the celebration within its community context, I have looked at its physical setting as well as its socio-economic background. A consideration of the two shed further light on the contemporary manifestation.

Because the community is encircled on three sides by hills, it is easily understandable why the adolescents have three major bonfires. The boys place a great deal of importance on height and visibility regarding the bonfire sites. The hills are the highest promotories in the vicinity and are in view of the entire community, thus satisfying the desires of the adolescents. The accessibility of wood from the surrounding spruce forests, and of tires from abandoned car wrecks offers an explanation as to the presence of these particular materials in the fires.

Up until the middle of the twentieth century the Brigus community operated on a yearly cycle of work and leisure activities. These activities were dictated by the fishery which served, either directly or indirectly, as the main means of support for the vast majority of the population.

As this economic pursuit was modified through time because of modernization and other factors, basic economic changes began to take place in the community lifestyle which, in turn, resulted eventually in social ramifications.

Particularly since the 1950's, the social occasions have either become formalized and centralized, or have slowly disappeared. But the bonfire celebration has been a stronghold in the midst of these other changing and dwindling traditional occasions. This anomaly attests to the fact that the celebration acts in important metaphorical ways for the community members.

This is further exemplified when examining the contemporary celebration and its "living-out"[2] of some of the community's everyday motives. The bonfire celebration in Brigus tells us what happens in the typical, recurring events of everyday life. Geertz suggests, in his observations of the Balinese enactment of the Cockfight, that "Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive; it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience; a story they tell themselves about themselves."[3] So, too, can the bonfire celebration be seen as such. This enactment displays the special relationships that exist between the participants, the participants and the community at large,

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[2]Abrahams, Rituals in Culture, p. 90.

[3]Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," in Myth, Symbol, and Culture, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), p. 26.

and the participants and their natural environment. Within this framed context, these relationships are "established," "displayed," and "celebrated."

In summary, I quote a statement from Abrahams' "Christmas and Carnival on St. Vincent," in which he so eloquently captures the meaning of enactments.

> This performance complex neither operates totally as an aesthetic alternative to life, nor as a reflection of some segment of reality, but as a stylized rendering of some of the central - if not always the ideal - motives repeatedly enacted by the group. As Clifford Geertz points out in regard to Balinese Cock-fighting, such performances are not an imitation of some pattern of Balinese life, nor a depiction of it, but rather 'an example of it, carefully prepared.'[4]

Much like Christmas and Carnival on St. Vincent and cock-fights in Bali, the bonfire celebration in Brigus can be seen as a stylized rendition of some of the fundamental motives of the community.

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[4]Abrahams, "Christmas and Carnival on St. Vincent," Western Folklore, 31(1972), 276.

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APPENDIX I

NEWFOUNDLAND BONFIRE TRADITIONS

QUESTIONNAIRE Q80C

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

DEPARTMENT OF FOLKLORE

NEWFOUNDLAND BONFIRE TRADITIONS

Newfoundland communities are rich in their traditions associated with the lighting of Bonfires on special occasions. If you have any information on this subject concerning your home community, or can get it from someone else, it would be greatly appreciated.

This material is part of the unwritten history of the province which the Department of Folklore is attempting to record and preserve. All information will be permanently filed in the Folklore and Language Archive.

Please answer as many of the questions as possible, in as much detail as you can. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

YOUR NAME _____ BIRTH DATE _____

HOME COMMUNITY _____ BAY _____

RELIGION _____ ANCESTRY (ENGLISH, IRISH, etc.) _____

NEIGHBOURHOOD _____ PHONE NUMBER _____

GRADE _____ SCHOOL NAME _____

1. Are bonfires still lit in your home community?

2. On what occasions are bonfires lit? (please give specific dates if possible, or time of year. If they are lit on more than one occasion, list them all).

3. Does the bonfire celebrate anything in particular? (e.g., Christmas, Hallowe'en, Guy Fawkes Night, Bonfire Night, Midsummer's Eve, a birth in the family?).

4. Is there a special name for the day of the Bonfire? (e.g., "Bonnie Fire Night", "Bonfire Night", "Guy Fawkes Night"?).

5. For each occasion when bonfires are lit in your community, is there more than one lit?

   If so, approximately how many fires are lit?

6. Do you light a bonfire around November 1st?

   If so, which day do you light it on?

7. Is there a specific name for the neighbourhood or locality where the fire is lit? (e.g., "Riverhead", "Englishtown", "Bunker's Hill", "My parents' back yard", etc.).

8. Is there one particular bonfire that is larger than the rest every year.

   If so, which one?

9. Approximately how many individuals participate in the building and lighting of each bonfire?

10. What is the age range of the people directly involved?

11. What is the sex of those involved? If both sexes are involved, how many of each?

12. When do the people begin gathering materials for the bonfire? (give approximate date, e.g., mid-September, mid-October).

13. Are the same people always involved with the same bonfire?

14. What kinds of materials are collected to be burned? (please list everything).

15. Which materials are preferred?

16. Why are these materials preferred?

17. How are the materials obtained for the bonfires? (e.g., go from door to door, ask for donations, cut wood in the forest, by "bucking", by "scoffing", by "swiping", other ways? list all).

18. Are materials gathered in particular neighbourhoods? Please name these neighbourhoods.

19. Are there particular individuals that you ask for materials? (merchants, fishermen, etc., please name them all).

20. Are there particular people that are avoided when asking for donations? Why? Who are these people?

21. Where are the materials stored prior to the bonfires?

Why are they stored in that particular place? Please give a physical description of the place.

22. When are the materials transported to the place where the bonfire is to be held?

23. How are the materials transported? (by cart, by hand, by bike, with the help of adults, others ways--please be specific and list all ways).

24. Does one group ever attempt to take materials from another group (give details)?

Is this done prior to the night of the bonfire and/or during the bonfire?

25. What time are the bonfires lit? (If there are different times for different bonfires, please specify and list all).

26. Who starts the fire? Anyone in particular? (e.g., oldest individual in the group, person in charge, etc.).

27. Is there a leader for the group? If so, how old is the leader in relation to the others in the group?

Why is this particular person chosen as the leader?

28. What other activities go on during the bonfire? (e.g., dancing, special foods, joking, singing, please explain each activity in detail).

29. Is anyone in particular responsible for keeping the fire going? If so, who?

30. Who makes up the audience?

31. Does everyone go home once the fire goes out?

If no, who stays?

32. What kind of activities go on after the fire is out?

33. Do the children take part in a particular bonfire normally play together at other times as well?

34. Have you noticed any changes in how Bonfire Night is celebrated over the years? If so, how? (e.g., are there less people participating, are there less fires, different materials burned?).

Why?

35. Have your parents or older members of the community ever mentioned any differences in how bonfires are celebrated now as compared to when they were active participants in the celebration? If so, How and Why?

APPENDIX II

MATERIAL DIRECTLY RELATED TO THIS STUDY WHICH ARE NOW HOUSED IN THE MUNFLA COLLECTION

Questionnaire

Newfoundland Traditions Q80C Nos. 1-183

Taped Interviews

Tom and Daisy Roberts	C4282-85
George Jerrett	C5026
Cannon Earle	C5027
Birdie Roberts	C5027
Dougie Finkston	C5028
Reverend Hatcher	C5028
Dulsie and Walter Spracklin	C5029
Warren, Terry, and Sheila	C5030

Visual Materials

3 1977 reel to reel black and white videotapes, unedited	81-015
6 1980 colour cassette videotapes, unedited	81-015
1 1980 colour cassette videotape, edited	81-015
251 colour slides	80800-1043s

END

22.10.82

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