Signing On:
Literacy, Knowledge and
Seafaring Work in Newfoundland, 1860 – 1930

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A Thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts, Department of History,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Memorial University of Newfoundland

May 2019
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Abstract

With one notable exception, the Newfoundland population's low literacy rates have been discussed historically from landward perspectives and with orthodox sources. Following the lead of Memorial University scholar David Alexander (1939–1980), this thesis analyzes literacy data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century work contracts of merchant seafarers. Mine is the first in-depth study of Newfoundland seafarers recorded in the Crew Agreements. I complement this analysis with the oral testimony of four master mariners. Their accounts facilitate an understanding of seafarers' literacy and knowledge acquisition in their social and working lives. My study is shaped by changes in how we perceive knowledge, understanding, literacy and orality, and the relationship of work and home. By expanding my research to reintegrate household and community relations into the lives of "working men who got wet," I offer an improved understanding of the role of social capital in the transformation of Newfoundland.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the staff of the Maritime History Archive at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I would like to thank Heather Wareham and Vince Walsh in particular for their assistance and advice. I would also like to thank the staff at the Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), especially Pauline Cox and Nicole Penney. Their expertise in finding original written transcripts and unearthing antiquated, but functioning, audio equipment was invaluable. Thanks as well to Dr. Asokan Variyath, Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Memorial University for his assistance with educational cohort analysis. Special thanks to Dr. Valerie Burton for her guidance, encouragement and patience.

This thesis is drawn from research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada though a Joseph A. Bombardier CGS-M Scholarship of $17,500, accompanied by a Dean's Excellence Award of $5,000.

Parts of this thesis have been published in: "Signing On: A Reconsideration of Newfoundlander's 'Illiteracy', 1860 – 1930," *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol. 31(2), (May 2019), DOI: 10.1177/0843871418824968.

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List of Abbreviations

ACSP	Atlantic Canada Shipping Project
Agreement	Crew Agreement
CLIP	Crew List Index Project
MHA	Maritime History Archive
MHG	Maritime History Group
MUN	Memorial University of Newfoundland
MUNFLA	Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive
MTLC	More Than a List of Crew (MHA website)
PRO	Public Record Office

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century the frequency with which Newfoundland-born seafarers used an 'x' to sign a Crew Agreement (Agreement) markedly distinguished them from other crew. Throughout the British Empire, an Agreement was a voyage-specific, legally-binding contract between seafarers and shipmasters. It documented personal data, as well as wages, departure and arrival dates, a scale of provisions and regulations for maintaining discipline.[1] Seafarers were required to sign an Agreement at the beginning of a voyage, and again sign off at the voyage termination to indicate payment of wages, by either signing their name or indicating their consent with an 'x.' While a signature does not necessarily imply literacy, studies in a variety of disciplinary fields have used the 'x' inscription as an indicator of illiteracy. Inadequacy in reading and writing skills is crassly construed as ignorance. In a concerted analysis of Newfoundland seafarers' literacy skills, this thesis approaches literacy from a more nuanced perspective than the understandings formed in a binary distinction between literate and illiterate people.

An old Newfoundland saying was: "Any man who would go fishing for a living, would go to hell for a pastime"[2] due to the long hours, dangerous working conditions and modest pay. This thesis explores the lives of seafarers working aboard vessels that would be recognized as merchant rather than fishing vessels, although fish shipments constituted

[1] "What Were Crew Agreements?," A History of the Agreements, *More Than a List of the Crew*, (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2011).
[2] Robert C. Parsons, *Toll of the Sea. Stories from the Forgotten Coast*, (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1995), 19.

the greater part of their outward-bound cargoes on voyages to mostly foreign ports. The vessels departed after the summertime fishing season ended when the population had finished curing the fish. Working conditions aboard these vessels could be as treacherous as those in the fishery, not least because this is hurricane season on the Atlantic Ocean. Nevertheless, there was potentially more financial security than in the inshore fishery, along with the lure of adventure in foreign lands. Many of those in the Agreements signed aboard sealing crews in the springtime or fished 'the Labrador' or the Grand Banks in summer, but I have not incorporated seafarers from those activities into this analysis. Including them would enrich the discussion, but they are outside its scope.

While the evidence comes from a predominantly male workplace, I take into account the methods by which seafarers acquired reading and writing capabilities. Exploring the ways females, with their surprisingly higher literacy rates, shaped seafarers' acquisition and continuation of literacy skills bridges seafarers' lives onshore and at sea. With few printed materials available, people overcame an inability to read or write in other ways. Children learned through formal, albeit irregular, school education, and, more importantly, in the informal oral sharing of local and experiential knowledge by family and community members. A number of recent studies provide rich details on outport[3] Newfoundlander's adaptability and innovation. I proceed by considering late nineteenth and early twentieth century seafarers in light of the new historiographies of maritime societies in general, and Newfoundland seafaring communities specifically.

[3] Small Newfoundland towns and villages outside St. John's are collectively referred to as "outports."

Newfoundland seafarers moved between home, the community and the sometimes global workplace, navigating within different hierarchies and cultures. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has given social scientists a resonant term for the set of relations and knowledge accumulated in operating within particular fields, where the economic and social value lies in the ability to obtain shared results: social capital.[4] If, like Bourdieu, we consider methods of navigating the world in terms of language and power, the term 'field' encompasses such spaces as the school and the community, the ship and the ports of call: sites that brought into play the relationship of language and power and created a need to adapt to shifting circumstances. With a thriving oral tradition in the Newfoundland community and aboard the vessel, it is conceivable that seafarers performed capably, gaining knowledge and experience with each voyage. Far from unintelligent, they held vast amounts of crucial information in memory and were able to recall it and take immediate action in life-threatening situations. Those needing literacy, such as masters and mates, attained the required skill levels by whatever means available. In this thesis, I will explore the methods seafarers employed to acquire reading and writing skills.

I focus on the period 1860 to 1930, seventy years of momentous change in the colony. Among the transformations were economic expansion on land, volatility in traditional fish consumer markets, tragedy with the high number of male casualties in a 1914 Sealing Disaster and World War One, ongoing political scandal and instability, and the onset of the Great Depression. Despite the turmoil, the majority of Newfoundlanders continued to work in maritime occupations. An analysis of signature rates in a seafaring work document supplies a good starting point for reconsidering literacy, but the

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 9-10.

importance of my study will rest on changing how and what is known historically about illiteracy in Newfoundland

The Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen administered the Agreements used in this study. However, the Keeper of the Public Records as head of the Public Record Office (PRO) in Britain (now the National Archive) had the legal responsibility for determining their fate after he had fulfilled the statutory requirements of record preservation. In 1966, the PRO decided to dispose of a majority of the Agreements and Account of Crew and Official Logbooks of the British Empire which covered the period 1861 - 1913, despite the objection of British historians. Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) economic historian David Alexander was a founding member of the Maritime History Group (MHG) that received funding for the transfer of a majority of these documents, and they eventually received 55,000 boxes of records.

From 1976 to 1982, the MHG endeavored to study, document and explain the rise and fall of Atlantic Canadian shipping in the nineteenth and twentieth century in its research programme, the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project (ACSP). Using the newly acquired Agreements and Official Log books, they created a massive computerized database for the first cliometric project of any kind in Canada, focusing on the four major fleets in the ports of Saint John, Yarmouth, Halifax and Windsor. The project led to the sponsorship of a series of annual conferences, and the members published numerous books and articles. The ACSP exceeded its goal of creating a centre of excellence in maritime history, and the Agreements are the specific record source that informed their endeavour. Their results inform many aspects of seafaring life under sail at the turn of the twentieth century, with one exception. Due to the dearth of Agreements for

Newfoundland they were unable to meet expectations of revealing the nature of seafaring in the colony.

The Agreements delivered to Memorial from Britain in the early 1970s contained virtually no Newfoundland Agreements, but other relevant Agreements were accessed later, and recently the MHA acquired sixty Newfoundland Agreements dating between 1919 and 1938. Without these records, the ACSP examined Agreements for four major Canadian ports, St John's being conspicuous by its absence. For his portion of the project, Alexander performed a multi-factoral analysis to compare literacy rates across the various nationalities working aboard Yarmouth-registered vessels. Through his efforts to investigate human resources and social mobility, he came to observe Newfoundlander's low literacy rates. In Alexander's view, a nation's most important resource was its people, and seafaring had long laboured under the presumption that it drew from a society's least capable. He appreciated the rarity of extant work records for an industry-based study of literacy: merchant seafarers were in this respect exceptional.

Alexander meticulously employed the statistical tools that were increasingly popular with historians identifying temporal trends. However, he died prematurely before resolving the theoretical and practical challenges that came with using an entirely new source for examining Newfoundlanders' illiteracy. My project answers his call to enhance our understanding of one of the under-analyzed characteristics of seafarers but surpasses his efforts with the first quantitative and qualitative study of Newfoundland crew members recorded in the Agreements.[5] Since the 1970s, remarkable advances in database

[5] Eric Sager, "The Port of St. John's Newfoundland, 1840-1889: A Preliminary Analysis," in Keith Matthews and Gerry Panting (eds.), *Ships and Shipbuilding in the North Atlantic Region*, (St. John's:

manipulation facilitate my analysis in a way that Alexander's team, tethered to mainframe computers, could only have dreamed.

Taking my study a great deal further than Alexander, I broaden my exploration of Newfoundland seafarers documented in the Newfoundland Agreements by complementing it with the oral testimony of four ship's masters gathered by Folklore students and housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA). I selected these men from the interviewees based on the ample evidence of their voyages in both their interviews and the Agreements. They were born in several Newfoundland outports between 1898 and 1923, and their oral histories are my counterpart archival source for investigating seafarers' literacy and knowledge acquisition in their social and working lives. It is important to mention that these four all became master mariners and that their literacy skills differentiated their opportunities from other seafarers with poor or no literacy skills. However, they were each a master of small-scale vessels with relatively few crew members in comparison to the larger steamships. Their observations are of a shipboard world in which all the crew shared through continuous interaction, and are therefore revealing of seafaring life at the turn of the century. Listening to their oral records enriched by a theorization of oral testimony, I will advance an understanding of the practices of knowledge acquisition and transmission through formal and informal education and workplace experience.

Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978), 21. Sager's article focused on shipbuilding activities, vessel size, registration trends and the character of Newfoundland shipping. "St. John's was not a typical maritime port. It was a large port in terms of the number of vessels registered … with a relatively small fleet in terms of tonnage and carrying capacity." At no point did Alexander or the other ACSP members examine seafarers in the Newfoundland Agreements because they were not available.

This thesis places literacy in a social and labour context. It briefly profiles the character of the province's shipping. A short account of the ships, deployment and voyage patterns is desirable because the Newfoundland Agreements are so new in the public domain that no secondary source provides this information. I am not about to undertake a close analysis of the crew found in the Agreements modelled after the ACSP treatment of fleets and crew in select Canadian ports – that is someone else's task. My work is as an analyst of what literacy meant and whether it mattered in the maritime society of Newfoundland at the turn of the century. This paper subverts the common perception that, because of their low literacy rates, Newfoundlanders lacked knowledge and may have been less capable than other, more literate, nationalities. Seafarers with weak, or no, literacy skills were, in fact, able to exist in, and contribute to, their communities and maritime workplaces. Although most would not become wealthy, they were able to maintain or improve their social status through membership in seafaring networks.

One of Bourdieu's leading concepts was 'habitus' – the environment in which people learn to think and act in specific ways through socialization.[6] Habitus embodies the individual and the collective, the inter-relationships within specific social groups. Seafarers were raised in a maritime community and workplace and habituated at an early age to the social order and their place within it. Social capital is the value gained through cooperation and reciprocity resulting from a shared sense of identity and values within a group. Although Bourdieu used the term to explain the ways in which the wealthy

[6] See Christina Costa and Mark Murphy (eds), *Bourdieu, Habitus and Social Research. The Art of Application,* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Introduction.

maintained their superior social standing, in Newfoundland's outport communities the social capital acquired through family members and mutual acquaintances in fact enabled seafarers to maintain or improve their economic and social standing. Those seafarers who travelled the world were exposed to diverse experiences and environments when they moved through new 'fields.' As the number of people in their social circle widened, their habitus transformed. Therefore, far from being deterministic, habitus is dynamic and can evolve within a social group in conjunction with individual member's experiences.

In a place where maritime activity has spawned a strong oral culture, the groundwork of Memorial academics has facilitated an understanding of the dynamic and robust nature of local knowledge. If literacy is to be "measured" in any meaningful sense, we also need to know more of what it meant in the maritime workplace. Aboard vessels, seafarers' functional knowledge was largely specific to their workplace and commonly acquired over time through oral transmission. But there are other actors/agents influencing literacy acquisition/application than are explicit in the Agreements and Logs, and this project follows the clues into the community in an exploration of social relations. There is tenability to the thesis that household and community relations interplayed with seafarers' literacy acquisition and working lives. Additionally, I question a limited construction of literacy by refining the relationship of reading and writing to a range of skills in the lives of seafaring workers. Both aspects of the maritime sphere – land and sea – jointly crafted the meanings and uses of literacy.

Finally, I contend that my research remains relevant in the twenty-first century. In the most recent national assessment of literacy and numeracy levels, scores for Newfoundland and Labrador's adults aged between sixteen and sixty-five were the lowest

of all provinces and territories with an astounding 56.8% literacy rate.[7] The provincial government's Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour recently held public consultations to develop an Adult Literacy Action Plan to equip the province with an "empowered and skilled workforce for our increasingly knowledge-based economy."[8] Although researchers and educators are progressively more aware of the importance of local knowledge and the value of its oral transmission, a lack of education can operate ideologically and materially as discriminatory. The conversation on Newfoundlanders' literacy is still very much alive because, despite numerous efforts by governments and educators, illiteracy persists.

My argument for re-joining Alexander's project, started forty years ago, is straightforward – the historian today is in a better place to make literacy and its pasts meaningful. Methodologies evolve, questions change, and traditional fields of study are re-evaluated. Social historians have rejected many binary models, recognizing the complexity inherent in human relations and economic structures. But mine is a cautious exploration of the relationship between literacy, orality and functional knowledge in Newfoundland during this tumultuous period. Archival research is not a passive method, but an active search to find meaning in records. Archives are spaces of power and inclusion, highlighting specific narratives and documents, but there are omissions, erasures, and silences. Carolyn Steedman has a glorious way of envisaging what remains unsaid: "How lucky the historian whose subjects say how they write – what rules and

[7] "Adults with Inadequate Literacy Skills, 2012," *Conference Board of Canada*. (accessed April 5, 2018 at http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/provincial/education/adlt-lowlit.aspx).
[8] *A Discussion Guide for Adult Literacy in Newfoundland and Labrador, March 2018*. (accessed April 5, 2018 at http://www.aesl.gov.nl.ca/adultlearning/discussion_guide.pdf).

procedures they follow, what they believe they are up to when they write!"[9] Each time historians interpret primary evidence, they implicitly treat it with an awareness of the period-specific social purpose and meaning of writing. Commencing a study of the functionality of literacy means we do not overlook these considerations.

My work is the first in-depth study of seafarers in the *Newfoundland and Labrador Crew Lists Database*, and the availability of the source materials means that I can ask new questions. What levels of writing skills did Newfoundland seafarers possess and how did they acquire these skills? To place my analysis in context, I ask how seafarers' literacy levels compare with the colony's general population. Being suspect of historic teleology – the precepts of continuing, inevitable advancement, I question whether literacy acquisition was a linear progression, and once acquired whether it would be an enduring skill. Most importantly, I ask whether literacy was a requirement in Newfoundland's most common workplace – aboard ship – or whether functional knowledge gained through work was sufficient for the majority of seafarers to earn a living. Taking into consideration that non-codified learning continues to be respected and preserved in Newfoundland, I explore the past by taking account of the methods through which we have come to understand the processes of informal transmission of knowledge better.

[9] Carolyn Steedman, "All Written Up," Review of "Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography" by Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke, *History and Theory* Vol. 50(3) (October 2011), 439.

CHAPTER 2. SITUATING THE SEAFARERS

2.1) The "Three 'R's" – Literacy Movements in the Nineteenth Century

Education and literacy are not equivalent. Education is a broad process that refers to the structured formal instruction, socialization, and acculturation of children in schools, while literacy is a competency that refers to the cognitive skills of reading and writing.[10] In the nineteenth century, politicians and educational reformers promoted literacy for reasons that varied from religious indoctrination to reduced reliance on state coffers for the relief of poverty. While literacy provides people with new skills and experience, literacy specialists Harvey Graff and Robert Arnove argue that campaigns are conducted for the authorities' purposes rather than to encourage individual objectives. They conclude that mass literacy movements are often promoted by authorities engaged in nation-building, and accompany social and political transformations.[11]

However, campaigns are also revealing of the values and objectives of various groups in a society, not merely the elite. Studying specific groups to establish whether they considered acquiring literacy skills to be important reveals diverging social and cultural values. Those in the lower economic classes may find work and support a family in the absence of reading and writing skills, as did many Newfoundland seafarers. Different social groups may also have varying literacy levels that fluctuate over time for a

[10] Leona M. English, "Teaching the 'Morally and Economically Destitute:' 19th Century Adult Education Efforts in Newfoundland," *Acadiensis* Vol. 41(2) (July 2012), 66-88, footnote 6.
[11] See Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), Introduction, 7.

variety of reasons.[12] The demonstration of literacy may be context bound and variable according to a group's specific economic, social and political circumstances. Therefore literacy acquisition is not necessarily linear or normative within a society.

Colonial governments endeavoured to eradicate illiteracy across the white settler empire by introducing compulsory schooling in the late 1800s, with mass schooling, teacher training, state control over the curricula and textbook publishing. The political importance of increasing literacy levels is apparent in the extent of power these central agencies exercised in regulating what was available to be read, the methods available for people to learn how to read and write, and how these skills would be employed.[13] For example, *The Royal School Readers* was a series of eight numbered elementary school textbooks that represented ascending reading levels from the commencement of schooling to final matriculation. Educators in Newfoundland and Labrador used these textbooks from the 1870s until well into the twentieth century.[14]

In the outports schools often consisted of one or two rooms and each grade was usually assigned a specific row, as in my elementary school in Tors Cove in the 1960s.The classroom arrangement meant that students were assigned several activities concurrently. Out of necessity teachers had to be skilled multi-taskers in order to meet the needs of each student while also ensuring that each grade progressed as per government standards. A view into the typical classroom might reveal the following scenario: "Primary, get out your copybooks and practice your letters. Preliminary, continue with

[12] See H.S. Bhola, "Literacy Discussion for the International Literacy Year, 1990," *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 30(4) (Winter 1990), 657.
[13] Bruce Curtis, "Some Recent Work on the History of Literacy in Canada," *History of Education Quarterly* 30 (4) (Winter 1990), 624.
[14] Dale Gilbert Jarvis, "Royal Readers," *Heritage Foundation Newfoundland and Labrador*. (accessed May 15, 2018 at http://www.ichblog.ca/2011/06/royal-readers-victorian-era-textbooks.html).

your sums and brush up on your multiplication tables. Intermediates, go over the poem I assigned yesterday."[15] This left little time for individual attention, and students and their parents were primarily responsible for securing a 'proper' education.

In the 1970s, Newfoundland's most prominent education historian, Phillip McCann, initiated a study of education, producing an impressive collection of books and articles that considered class, gender, religion and fishing society. To determine why more Newfoundlanders did not become literate, he explored the centrality of the family fishery, dominated by merchant capital and the truck system. In the spring, a local merchant supplied a fisherman with fishing gear and provisions for his family, against the guaranteed earnings of his future catch. The merchant set prices to his advantage in the fall, the fishermen rarely saw cash, and generally were permanently indebted to the merchant.

McCann found evidence for the earlier nineteenth century[16] suggesting outport parents believed that their children would not benefit from prolonged education because they saw little room for social mobility. Boys and girls worked continually during the fishing season, which interrupted their schooling and precluded many attaining higher literacy levels. By age fifteen boys generally worked full-time in the fishery or further offshore. Girls often left the community to enter domestic service, which served the dual

[15] Fran Baird Innes, "I'm Here to Teach," in *A Charm Against the Pain: Twenty-nine Voices from Newfoundland*, Georgina Queller et al. (eds.), (St. John's: Pennywell Books, 2006), 13.
[16] Phillip McCann, *Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education, 1836-1901*, (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, c1988), 12.

purpose of easing the family's financial situation while also enabling them to learn the domestic and fishery-related skills which would be valuable as a fisherman's wife.[17]

Sectarian differences are apparent in the overall picture. For example, an article written in 1982 in the Catholic newspaper *The Monitor* considered the Catholic Church's education efforts in Newfoundland in the mid-1800s. The author corroborates McCann's findings and reveals the early efforts of the Catholic Church to entice parents to prolong their children's education. Yet, as the Catholic School Inspector's report from 1859 reveals, encouragement may have been futile. In Harbour Grace, only seven of the seventy-five officially-enrolled students were in attendance for his visit. Their teacher explained he had been offered a government job that did not materialize. He had advised the parents that the school would be closed during the summer months and, as a result, many took their children to Labrador for the summer fishery. "Mr. Kelly reported that it was particularly unfortunate as this was one of the few schools that supplied books free to all students, which enabled even the poorest child to get a good education."[18]

This example also reveals the idiosyncrasies in the system and the obstacles with which the parents and children had to contend. Teachers were not very well paid and took alternate employment when the opportunity arose, while male teachers often supplemented their income with fishing. In this case, parents believed that school would not be held that summer, so they were obligated to take their children to work in the

[17] See Barbara Neis "From 'Shipped Girls to Brides of the State:' The Transition from Familial to Social Patriarchy in the Newfoundland Fishing Industry," *The Canadian Journal of Regional Science,* Vol. 16(2), (Summer 1993), 193. Domestic workers usually earned $2.50/month in the winter and $5.00 in the summer (for their additional labour in the fishery). Also see Linda Kealey, "Outport "Girls in Service": Newfoundland in the 1920s and 1930s," *Acadiensis* Vol. 43(2) (Summer/Autumn 2014), 79-98.
[18] Michael McCarthy, "Educators in R.C. Schools in 1859," *The Monitor* (April 1982), 24.

Labrador fishery. Outport residents were continually faced with hurdles that influenced whether their children attended school or joined activities that helped support the family.

As the new century arrived, many outport parents faced the same dilemma. An article in the *Harbour Grace Standard* in 1904 reveals an awareness of the detrimental effects of reduced school attendance due to the "evils of child labour" in the fishery: [19]

> … children overburdened with barrows of fish, and sweltering on a hot summer's day with bent backs "yaffling" fish on a flake or working with a hoe, that it would come as quite a surprise to us were we told that child slavery exists in Newfoundland. … I would therefore advocate that the legislature … pass a law that no child under twelve years of age at least be permitted to engage in certain kinds of labour.

The author contends that children must attend school regularly and complete their education to contribute to the advancement of Newfoundland society. Several of the suggestions to aid in accomplishing higher attendance rates were: abolishing fees (except for higher education), providing free textbooks and other school supplies, and educating parents on the importance of school attendance. Most important was the passing of "a compulsory education act with all due provision against undue interference with the employment of child labor, if such an act can be framed to meet *the peculiar circumstances of our people* (emphasis added)."[20] As the elite was intensifying efforts to

[19] Munn and Oke, Printer and Publisher, *Harbor Grace Standard and Conception Bay Advertiser* (Vol. XLV (30) (August 12, 1904), 4: "Mr. Burke, Superintendent of Education, in his report of that portion of the R.C. schools under his supervisions, draws a picture of the evils of child labour in this country." (accessed November 8, 2018 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/hgstandard/id/13727/rec/30).

[20] Munn and Oke, *Harbor Grace Standard and Conception Bay Advertiser*, August 12, 1904, 4

create a literate population within the constraints of the family fishery, Newfoundlanders were becoming more aware of the benefits of education:

> And so these tough, sturdy fellows live on, apparently from hand to mouth, unlettered themselves, knowing no horizon that is not bounded by a cod-fish wall, nor any pleasures that are not of the rudest and most primitive order. But their sons and daughters, during the winter time, are being taken in hand by the priest, clergyman, or minister, and taught to read and write, and derive from chance books and papers an idea of that vast intellectual turmoil that is going on thousands of miles away. [21]

This draws attention to the concept of extra-institutional education and religion's effect on education in Newfoundland. Within his statistical analysis, McCann provided denominational subsets, and discussed the differing standards of Catholic and Protestant school boards for reading, writing and arithmetic in the colony. He noted that following the Education Act of 1876, "[d]espite the legal requirement of schools to adhere to the very precise definitions of literacy and numeracy, some Boards either ignored or modified the regulation."[22] The church's influence on education may account for some differences in educational attributes, including gender differences as women were very active in community-based religious activities.[23] Although it would be worthwhile pursuing in future research, an in-depth consideration of the interplay of religion and literacy is outside the scope of this thesis.

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[21] Beckles Willson, *The Truth About Newfoundland, The Tenth Island. Being an Account of Our Senior Colony, Its People, Its Politics, Its Problems and Its Peculiarities,* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), 72.
[22] Phillip McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Education and Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador 1836-1986, Companion Volume Tables,* (St. John's: ISER Books, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994), Appendix III, 317.
[23] See Sandra Beardsall, ""I Love to Tell the Story." Women in Outport Newfoundland Methodism," *Canadian Woman Studies* Vol.17(1) (Winter 1997), 26-30.

McCann's assiduously collected data[24] on Newfoundland children's school attendance and performance in Board competency exams prove valuable in determining whether literacy skills were all that prevalent throughout the colony. I consider his data for the general school-aged population during this period to establish whether seafarers were less literate and whether literacy skills affected their future employability. McCann analyzed school enrolment as a percentage of children age five to fifteen in the general Newfoundland population, finding that 27.9% of children in the colony were registered in 1861.This rate almost doubled to 52.9% by 1906.[25] To help improve the situation, the Government had formed a Council of Higher Education in 1893, an inter-denominational body with the primary purpose of devising appropriate curricula. Mainly composed of educators in St. John's, the Council introduced annual exams based on a consistent colony-wide syllabus.[26]

Newfoundland educator George Story was a critic of this system that still endured in the 1970s, arguing that educators were more concerned with "questions of curriculum, uniformity, parity of standards, the intricacies of examining systems and the administration of a dispersed population, than with fashioning an education system consonant with the culture and knowledge of the fishing communities."[27] He maintained that the practice resulted in the perpetuation of economic and social divisions, often typified as a divergence between St. John's and the outports. Nevertheless, from the mid-

[24] See McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*. This volume consists of 329 pages of tables divided into four periods. It is in effect a comprehensive database of information on education and education-related economic factors over a 150-year span.
[25] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*, 262.
[26] Fred W. Rowe, *The History of Education in Newfoundland*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952), 102-103.
[27] George Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," in Joseph R. Smallwood and Gregory J. Power (eds.), *The Book of Newfoundland*, Vol. v (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., 1975), 351. Story pioneered the study of Newfoundland language, history and culture.

nineteenth century, ongoing hardship, economic depression and war interrupted or terminated many children's education when they became helpers in the household-based fishery workforce. Above all, cod persevered as the colony's economic foundation.

2.2) A Colony Built on Cod

The island of Newfoundland is comprised of more than one thousand miles of rugged coastline, and seafaring is unsurprisingly central to many aspects of its history. The original indigenous inhabitants subsisted on the bounty of the sea, as did Vikings arriving in longboats over one thousand years ago. Subsequently, Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain harvested the rich cod stocks while decimating the indigenous populations in their fight to control the 'fishing station' strategically located between Europe and North America.[28] Eventually, year-round inhabitants survived on the stormy North Atlantic by learning the nuances of winds, tides and seasons. Men became such proficient seafarers that the colony was considered a nursery for seamen.[29] In time, females settled on the island, raising families, provisioning households, and working to dry and salt fish as part of the inshore family fishery. Maritime work has been the most significant occupational sector in Newfoundland for centuries, and maritime customs and practices continue in many communities today.

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[28] See Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*, (VA: Williamsburg, 2004).

[29] Willson, *The Truth About Newfoundland,* 194-195. "There exists in this one colony of Newfoundland 40,000 loyal, hardy, rugged mariners, who are in a state of enforced idleness for the greater part of the year. These men are Englishmen of the best type – descendants of the sea-dogs of Drake and Hawkins – fearless and stubborn, yet quick to learn, and singularly amenable to discipline. These men are … powerfully built, of simple though intelligent character, and accustomed to every species of maritime hardship. They are, in short, of the best type of the old fashioned British tar."

Since the late fifteenth century dried codfish export was a mainstay of Newfoundland's economy, carried to foreign markets by the ships of other nations.[30] Cod was valuable as a preserved food that was relatively easy and inexpensive to catch, salt and transport. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the bulk of export was taken over by Newfoundland carriers, and local vessel construction increased considerably. The Agreement sample I analyzed consisted of 225 voyages for 176 vessels. While Newfoundland merchants owned the majority of these vessels, and most of those owners resided in St. John's, registered owners were also located in Nova Scotia and various British ports such as Greenock and Liverpool. Nevertheless, the crews for each voyage consisted mainly of Newfoundland seafarers and all of the Agreements are located in the *Newfoundland and Labrador Crew Lists Database* at the MHA.

Table 2.1 conveys vessel sizes in tonnage, ranging from 73 to 4,272. While most of the larger vessels were steamships, the majority of the vessels in my sample were smaller wooden sailing ships. Of the total vessels analyzed, 114 had a Gross Registered tonnage of less than 300.

[30] Willson, *The Truth About Newfoundland,* 70-71. "There were often sixty and seventy Spanish vessels loading fish in the port of St John's alone, and a large number at Harbour Grace. Spanish onzos [a gold doubloon] and Mexican dollars were then common, even to abundance, in the island."

TABLE 2.1: VESSEL SIZE

Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT)	Number of Vessels
<100	7
100 – 149	44
150 – 199	30
200 – 249	18
250 – 299	15
300 – 349	18
350 – 399	10
400 – 499	10
500 – 599	6
600 – 699	3
700 – 799	1
800 – 899	3
900 – 999	2
>1,000	9
Median: 214	176

The cargoes Newfoundland ships carried in the twentieth century differed from the traditional loads of the nineteenth century because of changing foreign markets and increasing competition. Due to escalating problems with properly curing higher volumes of smaller fish, the Newfoundland government introduced a *tal qual* system where merchants bought ungraded fish in bulk at a specific price.[31] They then filled the holds of ships that raced to foreign ports to obtain premium prices. James Murray, a fish merchant and political figure in the late nineteenth century, wrote several articles on the colony's commercial life. In explaining that Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and various Mediterranean ports took bulk cod laden 'naked' (unpacked) in the hold of the vessel, he used a vernacular term that would be understood on the gangways and beaches of

[31] Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador. A History,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 23.

Newfoundland.[32] 'The Brazils' purchased small fish packed tightly in drums (112 lbs.) or half drums, and the West Indies took fish of inferior quality, provided that it was hard and dry[33] (to feed slave populations). The majority of voyages in my sample were destined for the Mediterranean and Brazil, and most, if not all, were employed in transporting Newfoundland (and Labrador) salt cod to its principal markets. Each vessel included in Table 2.2 was active in the British imperial merchant marine. In British imperial trade, there was a distinction between coasting and foreign-going voyages, and Newfoundland was no different in administering the Agreements. A foreign-going form might involve a trip to Spain or Brazil, while a coastal voyage remained along the coast to a Newfoundland port. It would appear that not every coasting voyage had an Agreement administered as only eighteen[34] appear in my database compared with two hundred and seven foreign-going.

[32] Basil Greenhill's *The Merchant Schooners*, (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 28-30 contains an in-depth explanation of the salting and loading processes.
[33] James Murray, "The Fisheries of Newfoundland," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* 29(4), (April 1930), 31. (accessed February 3, 2018 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/quarterly/id/30267/rec/2.) See also: Shannon Ryan, *Fish Out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade*, (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1986).
[34] As previously noted, sealing and in-shore fishing vessels are excluded.

TABLE 2.2: VOYAGE SUMMARY

Destination Port	# of Voyages	%
Brazil	37	16.50
Caribbean	16	7.00
Canada	16	7.00
Great Britain	15	7.00
Mediterranean	44	19.50
Newfoundland*	43	19.00
St. John's	36	16.00
Various	18	8.00
Total:	225	100.00%

* Voyages to various Newfoundland ports, such as Carbonear, Harbour Grace or Belleoram, as distinct from St. John's.[35]

Agreements contain British consul endorsement stamps for Caribbean ports, such as that for the *Clutha* returning from a voyage to Gibraltar in 1920.[36] British maritime law required the master of a vessel to deposit his Agreement with the local shipping master or consular official within forty-eight hours of arrival in a port. The official then placed an endorsement specifying the name of the port and the official entrance and clearance dates for the vessel. These stamps are evidence of voyages stopping over at several ports of call on wide-ranging, multi-leg voyages. [37] For the voyages in my sample, a trip from St. John's to Pernambuco, Brazil averaged 160 days. However, one twelve-month voyage landed at Cadiz and Bahia, and the ship was eventually declared unseaworthy in Barbados. A trip from St. John's to Oporto, Portugal averaged 135 days, but the longest

[35] Robert C. Parsons, *Toll of the Sea. Stories from the Forgotten Coast*," (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1995), 18. Up to the end of the 1930s, Belleoram was the centre of Harvey and Company's south coast fishery and export business due to the value of its sheltered harbour and proximity to rich fishing grounds.
[36] MHA, *Clutha*, O.N. 79429, 1920.
[37] See also Section 3.9 (page 85) for an account of the eight-month voyage of the *Nellie M* in 1915.

lasted thirteen months and ten days and the Agreement contained consular stamps for Alicante, Torrevieja, Barbados, Marseille, Malaga and Cadiz. Through analysis it becomes apparent that the seafarers on these voyages spent a considerable amount of time at sea or in ports away from home. Further, the range of destinations in particular Agreements points to the necessity of skilled navigators aboard ship.

The world became highly globalized in the nineteenth century, and maritime trade integrated many regions into the international economy. Merchant shipping was always a global activity, involving the transport of goods bought and sold on world markets.[38] With the consular stamps on an Agreement comes a reminder of British mercantile supremacy, built in this case upon Newfoundlander's expertise in the Mediterranean, South American and Caribbean trades. Notwithstanding that expertise, the number of long-distance voyages decreased as the quality of salt cod produced deteriorated. This has been attributed to locals having had little incentive to produce a superior cure of dried cod under the *tal qual* system. If the codfish was not properly handled during the various stages of drying, this resulted in an inferior product. Eventually quality and prices dropped, delivering a massive blow to the colony's commercial life.

2.3) David Alexander's Work

Historians have made notable contributions to the discussion of literacy and its relationship to economic development: David Alexander's came from an unexpected source. In the 1970s, Alexander published several works on the lack of economic stability

[38] Sarah Palmer, "The Maritime World in Historical Perspective," *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol. 23(1) (June 2011), 7.

or growth in the colony. His renowned work, *The Decay of Trade* (1977), explores the deterioration of the Newfoundland salt fish trade, a topic distant from literacy. Alexander argued that while politicians did not manage marine resources properly or promote adequate colony-wide marketing strategies,[39] the eventual failure of the industry was not inevitable. He reasoned that the collapse had more to do with not effectively employing the local population's skills and resources. Widening his scope, he began to link economic issues to cultural attributes in "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland*"* (1980). In this article, Alexander argued that a strong economic base is essential for a strong society and that historians often accept a society's literacy level as a measure of economic and political development.[40] Alexander stated that his objective was "simply to measure the level of literacy, as literacy was an increasingly essential tool" in personal life and vital in debating, defining and implementing the goals of a country.[41] If we scrutinize his approach, it appears that he was normalizing male literacy without considering female portion of the population's reading and writing skills. I improve on Alexander's approach by expanding my study to draw attention to women's contribution to the learning environment and reveal their higher literacy rates. However, as Alexander found, measuring literacy is problematic as it can vary widely among individuals in terms of the capacity to read and write.

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[39] See Mel Baker, "Challenging the Merchants Domain": William Coaker and the Price of Fish, 1903 – 1919, *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* Vol. 29(2) (Fall 2014), 189-227. Baker points out that fish merchants were also responsible, as exporters were reluctant to cooperate and competed fiercely to acquire and sell the colony's fish.

[40] Eric W. Sager, "Newfoundland's Historical Revival and the Legacy of David Alexander," *Acadiensis* Vol.11(1) (October 1981), 110.

[41] David Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland." *Acadiensis* Vol.10(1) (October 1980), 7.

Like McCann, Alexander surveyed the existing records in an attempt to establish literacy levels in the colony. Alexander stated that enumerators in the 1869 and 1874 Newfoundland censuses counted the number of 'children' who were able to 'read *and* write,' but after 1884 the question was modified to enumerate all those who could 'read *or* write,' while children with very minimal skills in either were likely counted as illiterate. He adds that an individual's capacity to read and write is implanted and confirmed between the ages of ten and fifteen. An appropriate measure of literacy is the percentage of the population ten years and above with this capacity. According to the *1901 Census of Newfoundland*, the total recorded population of the colony (all ages) was 217,037. Of those, 114,835 people (53%) claimed to have an ability to read, but only 97,146 (45%) a writing capacity.[42] This was a significant gap that varied by gender and location. Of the total number of residents claiming to have literacy skills, 9% more females in St. John's are enumerated as having reading skills than males and 7% more with writing skills. In the rural areas, 2% more males are enumerated as having both reading and writing skills in comparison to females. Despite the efforts of various groups to increase literacy skills, approximately one half of the colony's residents were still unable to read or write as the new century arrived.

Alexander continued his exploration, but did not have access to Newfoundland Agreements to further his study on literacy rates in Newfoundland. He pursued his work with an Atlantic Provinces dataset wherein there were seafarers of many nationalities. The passing reference to the Agreements being "rather good indicators of the literacy of

[42] "Census of Newfoundland, 1901," Us.archive.org Website, 394 and 401. (accessed January 23, 2018 at https://ia801601.us.archive.org/34/items/1901981901fnfldv11903eng/1901981901fnfldv11903eng.pdf).

masters engaged in various trades"[43] in fellow MHG historian Keith Matthews' initial review article gave few signs of the entirely unforeseen application his co-director in the ACSP would pioneer. While quantifying the Agreements, Alexander realized the implications of the routinely required seafarer's signature. In his pioneering essay "Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899" Alexander quantified factors such as age, cohort, job and birthplace to examine the most important resource of a country – the people. Looking to disprove the theory that only 'desperate and ill-qualified' men looked to the sea for employment, he did not find evidence that seafaring recruited from the less literate in a given population.[44]

Grappling with statistics that maritime countries with fewer resources than Newfoundland, such as Iceland, established flourishing economies, Alexander continued to investigate the relationship of literacy levels and quality of life. One of his observations drawn from his work on the Yarmouth database went beyond "the few coveted positions on the quarterdeck" and envisaged these men who were seafarers having a place in a "queue" for other jobs and assets at home, "such as joining the family fishing crew, or taking up possession of the parental farm, cottage or shop."[45] Considering the implications of literacy in society, his analysis needed to contextualize the meanings and uses of literacy in homes and communities. He reworked the ontology of his essay by admitting a female autodidactic voice in the final paragraph, that of Francie Nicol. She was a poor, uneducated woman in early twentieth century England married to a tippler

[43] Keith Matthews, "Crew Lists, Agreements and Official Logs of the British Empire 1863-1913," *Business History* Vol. 16(1) (January 1974), 79.
[44] Alexander, "Literacy Among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 32.
[45] Alexander, "Literacy Among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 30.

who refused to provide her with support. Despite her lack of education and experience, she opened a shop in South Shields to sustain herself and her children. Alexander cites her autobiography to argue that landward working class life could be equally brutal to the one seafarers experienced, including that of working class women. However, he did not have to time to thoroughly revise his article, which, when published posthumously, left this insight under-developed. His preliminary efforts based on the Agreements reveal his aspirations to answer the many questions on seafaring literacy that remained.

2.4) Introducing the Newfoundland Crew Agreements

The British Board of Trade was involved in economic and industrial matters both within the British Isles and throughout the empire. Merchant shipping was a particular concern with its very own department – the mercantile marine department – and a Registrar. The Agreements administered by that official are invaluable to historians interested in studying not only maritime history but the economic and social history of maritime-oriented societies worldwide. Agreements are serial, longitudinal and mobile, and ostensibly contain the records of every person who worked as a crew member on a British-registered ship anywhere in the Empire.[46] Containing more than twenty-five million signatures, they are as comprehensive and global a coverage as could be imagined for any industry. Paradoxically, although Newfoundland was firmly enmeshed in imperial relations it is likely the place in which they were least routinely administered.

[46] "Crew Lists and Log Books," *Maritime History Archive*. (accessed November 5, 2017 at https://www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlist.php.)

Like Alexander, I use quantitative methodology as one part of my exploration of Newfoundland seafarers' literacy and functional knowledge. However, I did not start with the view that statistics will settle the matter of whether literacy was essential to social mobility. My exploration is more nuanced, and I incorporate first-hand accounts from seafarers' oral histories and biographies alongside recent studies that provide valuable details on early seafaring communities. Quantitative analysis and qualitative reasoning are not binaries but increments on a broad continuum. Literacy specialist H.S. Bhola puts the two in tension when he scolds historians for attempting to apply a single definition of literacy across time and space, attributing this to the "positivist compulsions" of signature-counting historians.[47] Signature data are a useful minimal indicator of literacy, but they assume literacy is clearly defined – a person either is or is not literate. The data do not reveal more about a signatory's degree of literacy, and an ability to sign one's name may have been the only writing skill that a person possessed.

Conversely, pioneering historical demographer Roger Schofield's defense of a signature as the best gauge of literacy still holds. He argued that it is standard and direct as an average measurement; in general, more people could read than write and fewer could write fluently than could sign their name.[48] Cultural historian Peter Burke weighed in on the debate in 1994. Citing the work of researchers in several countries, he concluded that there is a consensus that "the level of signatures runs below but closely parallels

[47] Bhola, "Literacy Discussion for the International Literacy Year, 1990," 658.
[48] Roger Schofield, "Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750-1850," *Explorations in Economic History* Vol. 10(4) (Summer 1973), 440-442.

reading skills."[49] Bhola concedes that historians should not stop counting, but their methods should evolve so that counting is used to create meanings of literacy practices in societies. He also calls for a greater theoretical application to the historical data generated. Utilizing the Agreements to enumerate literacy is a sound strategy, but my approach attends to the call to go beyond 'simply counting.' Just as there is more to literacy than a signature, there is more to knowledge acquisition and transmission than reading and writing competency.

Numbers are neutral and only reveal their stories through manipulation.[50] Alexander's original study contained numerous tables in which he analyzed crew nationality and age composition, literacy rates, joining and discharge ports and wages. While my study has fewer, its ten tables are key to my temporal analysis of Newfoundland seafarers' literacy rates by geography and occupation. Using signature rates as an indicator of literacy, I analyze age group, capacity served and birthplace. One significant distinction is the presence of females, and I provide data for nineteen Stewardesses aboard Newfoundland vessels in Table 2.8. Performing an educational cohort analysis, I group seafarers based on the period in which they were aged ten to fourteen and likely to have been in school. This is necessary if I am to assess seafarers' literacy rates in comparison to statistical data on attendance rates and competency scores for the general school-aged population. Analysis becomes a richer proposition in the

[49] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate 1994), 251. "Research on the ability to sign conducted about England (Schofield), New England (Lockridge), France (Furet), Sweden (Johansson), Portugal (Magalhaes) and other European regions led to endless debates among researchers."

[50] John Sutton Lutz and Barbara Neis (eds.) *Making and Moving Knowledge. Interdisciplinary and Community-based Research in a World on the Edge,* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 32. They make the case that computers provide growing opportunities to access data and information, but "they do not provide context, they do not make us wise. They may not even make us better informed."

cross-referencing between various elements in the Agreements and extraneous documentation.

Readers should note the time intervals in the following tables are not entirely uniform. The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, UK holds a collection of Agreements, including those for 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895 and 1905,[51] and I was unable to travel to access them. Without any records for the years ending in a '5' it would be impossible for any researcher to perform a comprehensive longitudinal analysis. Additionally, the Museum has not completed indexing on the retained records and it would be challenging to locate Newfoundland Agreements even with official ship numbers. Therefore, I have constructed each table without these records, and four-year groupings suffice for the second half of each pre-World War I decade. There are substantially fewer Agreements before 1914, and therefore my sampling techniques are different for pre- and post-war records. I examined every available Agreement between 1863, the first year they are available at Memorial, and 1914 for the existence of crew signatures.[52] Post-World War I, my analysis consists of a selective sampling of voyages terminating in 1919/20, 1924/25 and 1929/30. Although seafarers from Denmark, Chile, Singapore and many other countries signed onto these vessels, my object of analyzing the literacy rates of Newfoundland crew meant identifying and selecting out seafarers who declared themselves Newfoundland-born (at a time, to be unambiguous, when they were British subjects and not subjects of a confederated Canada).

[51] Matthews, "Crew Lists," 79.
[52] Matthews, "Crew Lists," 78-80. "In theory every vessel, whether registered in the colonies or in Britain, was supposed to submit these returns, but it is apparent that … many colonial ones, especially small Newfoundland fishing and coastal vessels, did not."

Despite the standard requirements for completing Agreements, a bundle may contain a number of documents generated during various stages of a voyage.[53] In the course of my research, it became apparent that some agents in the colony of Newfoundland were flexible in compiling an Agreement depending on local circumstances, but most tried to secure the contractual signature or 'x' on at least one occasion. In the earlier years, 'crew lists' were often an actual list written by one person.[54] For example, Newfoundlanders comprised thirteen of the eighteen crew members on the *Wolf* voyaging from St. John's to Greenock in 1868,[55] and eight of the nine crew members aboard the *F. H. Odiorne* travelling the same route in 1880,[56] but neither Agreement contains actual signatures. In other Agreements, such as for the *Brothers* in 1873,[57] the entire twelve-man crew is listed on page one, but there is an additional "Colonial Articles" page on which an 'x' denotes those who could not sign their name. If a crew member left a vessel en-route for any reason, there are detailed notes in the "Certificates" section attesting to a cause and the payment of wages. Seafarers were also contractually required to 'sign-off' each vessel at the end of a voyage, and this provides an additional accuracy check.

A few Log Books accompany these Agreements. On the 1870 – 71 voyage of the *Courtenay* to Pernambuco, Brazil[58] the captain reported *Very Good* "General Conduct" and "Ability in Seamanship" for each seafarer. The Master signed all entries,

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[53] "Types of Agreements and Accounts," *Maritime History Archive*. (accessed July 22, 2018 at https://www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlistforms.php.)
[54] For assistance with understanding handwriting, see https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/toolkit/reading/.
[55] MHA, *Wolf*, O.N. 34488, 1868.
[56] MHA, *F H Odiorne*, O.N. 55522, 1880.
[57] MHA, *Brother*s, O.N. 50946, 1873.
[58] MHA, *Courtenay*, O.N. 51149, 1871.

which were witnessed by the Mate, and both display refined penmanship. Rather than an Agreement, the *Sea Nymph* links to a Log Book dated September 1867,[59] revealing the master of this vessel took sick and died in hospital. The vessel's owners apologetically advised the Superintendent of the Shipping Office in Liverpool that the crew had been dismissed and there was no one to officially record the Captain's death. The Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen's reach stretched far: owners and their representatives jumped to provide the required documentation, and not even death could offer a reprieve.

To examine the demographic structure of the crew, Alexander analyzed the crews' age composition in each decade before 1899 and found that the majority were in the 20 to 29 age range. My analysis of the Newfoundland Agreements between 1860 and 1930, shown in Table 2.3, arrived at similar results with 54% of total crew members aged 20-29. The percentage of seafarers in this age group decreased in the post-1900 period, while those aged 30-39 stayed constant throughout the analysis period and the 40-49 age group increased by 5%. This may be indicative of crew remaining longer at sea or joining at a later age. Even so, the majority of Newfoundland seafarers who signed Agreements were in their twenties, and most of those appear to have moved on to other fleets or employment within a decade.

Regarding the total number of officers in the Newfoundland sample, Table 2.4 shows results similar to that for the entire crew. Before 1900 the majority were aged 20 to 29, those aged 30 to 39 comprised the next largest group, followed by those aged 40 to 49. From 1900 onwards, the percentage of officers in each of the above groups decreased slightly, while there was a 9% increase in the number of officers aged 50 to 59. In

[59] MHA, *Sea Nymph*, O.N. 26210, 1867.

general, Masters and Mates tended to remain at sea longer than junior ranks, having reached a higher posting with better wages. Of course this is characteristic of the labour market in general: a person's experience and/or education increases which can lead to promotion with a higher salary; improved working conditions and higher wages entice a person to remain longer in the workforce. In this instance, seafarers enjoyed the same rewards of seniority, but as "working men who got wet."

TABLE 2.3: AGE COMPOSITION OF TOTAL CREW

Age	1861-64	1866-69	1870-74	1876-79	1880-84	1886-89	1890-94	1896-99	Sub-totals	%
5 - 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
10 - 19	6	5	6	1	3	0	0	1	22	5.0
20 - 29	23	54	92	20	34	9	27	6	265	62.0
30 - 39	6	23	30	5	20	-	1	7	92	22.0
40 - 49	3	13	5	7	5	-	4	1	38	9.0
50 - 59	1	1	-	1	-	-	2	-	5	1.0
60 - 69	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.3
70 - 79	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
Unknown	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	0.7
SUB-TOTALS	*39*	*98*	*134*	*34*	*63*	*9*	*34*	*15*	*426*	*100*

Age	1900-04	1906-09	1910-1914	1919	1924	1929	Sub-totals	%
5 - 9	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	.15
10 - 19	4	2	-	57	15	20	98	6.80
20 - 29	32	14	41	343	119	111	660	46.30
30 - 39	20	2	24	139	59	68	312	22.00
40 - 49	16	8	11	72	48	52	207	14.50
50 - 59	9	1	7	47	26	19	109	7.60
60 - 69	-	-	2	11	6	9	28	2.00
70 - 79	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	0.15
Unknown	-	-	1	2	2	1	6	0.50
SUB-TOTALS	*81*	*27*	*86*	*673*	*275*	*282*	*1,424*	*100*

	{1861-1899	+	1900-1914}	=	1861-1914	1919-1930	*1861-1930*
TOTALS	*{426*	+	*194}*	=	*620*	*1,230*	*1,850*

TABLE 2.4: AGE COMPOSITION OF OFFICERS

Age	1860-64	1866-69	1870-74	1876-79	1880-84	1886-89	1890-94	1896-99	Sub-totals	%
5 - 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
10 - 19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
20 - 29	1	6	9	-	1	-	-	2	19	41.0
30 - 39	-	4	7	1	1	-	-	-	13	28.0
40 - 49	-	4	1	1	1	-	2	1	10	21.0
50 - 59	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4.0
60 - 69	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.0
70 - 79	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
Unknown		1			1				2	4.0
SUB-TOTALS	*2*	*16*	*18*	*2*	*4*	*-*	*2*	*3*	*47*	*100*

Age	1900-04	1906-09	1910-1914		1919	1924	1929		Sub-totals	
5 - 9	-	-	-		1	-	-		1	0.3
10 - 19	-	-	-		5	-	1		6	1.7
20 - 29	2	4	7		68	25	17		123	37.0
30 - 39	4	-	5		45	17	14		85	25.8
40 - 49	3	1	2		25	12	17		60	18.0
50 - 59	1	-	-		24	11	8		44	13.0
60 - 69	-	-	-		5	2	2		9	3.0
70 - 79	-	-			-	-	2		2	.6
Unknown	-	-	1		1	-			2	.6
SUB-TOTALS	*10*	*5*	*15*		*174*	*67*	*61*		*332*	*100*

	{1861-1899	+	1900-1914}	=	1861-1914		1919-1930		*1861-1930*
TOTALS	*47*		*30*		*77*		*302*		*379*

(NOTE: 379 Officers + 1,471 Crew = 1,850 Total)

To test whether seafarers were drawn from those with poor literacy skills, Alexander used an Agreement signature as a measure of literacy for workers of various nationalities aboard Yarmouth vessels in the late nineteenth century. He then compared these with national literacy rates,[60] finding that Newfoundland seafarers ranked among the lowest group with literacy rates of 44%.[61] An example from my Agreement sample substantiates his findings that Newfoundland seafarers had very low literacy rates while also revealing the scope of research necessary for this project. Twenty-year-old Paddy [?] Carey signed on the *Madeleine Constance* March 14, 1919 in St. John's, Newfoundland bound for Bahia, Brazil.[62] 'Signed' is a generous term as he had great difficulty writing his barely legible name. On the same saltwater-stained page is the signature of ten-year-old cabin boy F. Coward, whose writing looks suspiciously similar to that of the vessel's Master, Samuel Coward, with the same local address. An 'x' denotes John French, the oldest to sign aboard at fifty-five, could not provide a signature. In a crew of sixteen males, the requirement to sign aboard a vessel exposes seafarers' diverse writing competencies. Table 2.5 treats this point from the 1,850 Newfoundland seafarers in my sample.

[60] Generally male-only literacy rates. Alexander used sources varying from bridegrooms' signature rates in marriage registers to army recruitment signature levels.
[61] Alexander, "Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 16.
[62] MHA, *Madeline Constance*, O.N. 99834, 1919. All of the vessels and Crew Agreements referenced in this paper are accessible in the Newfoundland Crew Lists Database at https://www.mun.ca/mha/nlcrews/nlcrews.php.

TABLE 2.5: TOTAL CREW SIGNATURE RATES

	# Signatures		% Signatures		TOTALS
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1863-64	14	25	36	64	39
1866-69	38	60	39	61	98
10 Yr. Total	52	85	38	62	137
1870-74	59	75	44	56	134
1876-79	15	19	44	56	34
10 Yr. Total	74	94	44	56	168
1880-84	16	47	25	75	63
1886-89	3	6	33	66	9
10 Yr. Total	19	53	26	74	72
1890-94	11	23	32	68	34
1896-99	8	7	53	47	15
10 Yr. Total	19	30	39	61	49
1863-1899 TOTALS	164	262	38.5	61.5	426
1900-04	57	24	70	30	81
1906-09	15	12	55.5	44.5	27
10 Yr. Total	72	36	66.5	33.5	108
1909-1914	54	32			
5 Yr. Total	54	32	63	37	86
1900-1914 TOTALS	126	68	65	35	194
PRE-WWI TOTALS	290	330	46.5	53.5	620
1919	494	179	73.5	26.5	673
1924	174	101	63	37	275
1929	208	74	74	26	282
POST-WWI TOTALS	876	354	71	29	1,230
OVERALL TOTALS	1,166	684	63%	37%	1,850

Before 1900 an average of 38.5% of seafarers could sign in every decade, slightly lower than Alexander's rates, but these numbers improved substantially to 74% by 1929. There is no linear progression: signature rates increased in the 1870s, decreased considerably in the 1880s and then returned to 1860s levels in the 1890s. While the overall rates are deplorably low before 1900, they are based on a total of 426 seafarers

and further investigation would prove useful to establish reasons for the significant variations from decade to decade. In the 1900 to 1910 period, there is a noteworthy 28% increase in signature provision and the rates remain relatively constant up to the beginning of World War I. Post-war rates show further large increases, culminating in the record high signature rate in 1929. The rates from 1900 to 1929 are based on a sample of 1,424 seafarers, more than three times the number of seafarers in the pre-1900 sample due to the availability of Agreements previously mentioned. Therefore the difference in sample size may be a factor influencing my results.

TABLE 2.6: CREW SIGNATURE RATES BY AGE GROUP

Age Group	Signature Provided #		Total #	Signature Provided %	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
5 – 9	2	0	2	100.0	0.0
10 – 19	88	32	120	73.5	26.5
20 – 29	595	330	925	64.5	35.5
30 – 39	248	156	404	61.5	38.5
40 – 49	145	100	245	59.0	41.0
50 – 59	62	52	114	54.5	45.5
60 – 69	15	14	29	52.0	48.0
70 – 79	2	0	2	100.0	0.0
Unknown	9	0	9	100.0	0.0
TOTALS	1,166	684	1,850	63.0	37.0

Disaggregating by age group, literacy rates are inversely related to age across the entire period from 1863 to 1929, as shown in Table 2.6. They are lowest for the 60 to 69-year-old group and rise linearly for each group to those aged 10 to 19 (excluding two seafarers in each of the outlier groups aged 1 to 9 and 70 to 79 with a 100% signature rate). Seafarers in the youngest age group had a 20% higher signature rate than those in

the oldest group. Alexander's findings were similar to mine in that those seafarers who remained at sea into their thirties and forties were significantly less literate than those who joined in their late teens and twenties. This means that younger crew members had a higher likelihood of being literate and more options in terms of work onshore or promotion aboard ship. Nevertheless, it also indicates that older seafarers were able to find employment despite a lack of reading and writing skills. Seafaring experience and their orally-transmitted knowledge acquisition at sea meant that nearly half of those in my sample aged forty and older signed aboard with an 'x' and were not precluded from seafaring work.

Analyzing seafarers by birthplace and capacity employed allows a comparison of officers and crew signature rates by location. Table 2.7 shows that throughout the entire period of analysis (1863 to 1929), officers residing in St. John's had a 98% signature rate, while outport officers signed aboard at 97.5%. The rates in each location are comparable and exceptionally high, as was expected. Non-officers living in St. John's provided a signature, as distinct from signing with an 'x,' at a rate of 46% and those from the outports at 63%. When disaggregated by this geography, 17% is a significant difference where nearly one-fifth more rural-born and educated non-officer seafarers provided a signature than their St. John's counterparts. However, outport seafarers often travelled to the city searching for work aboard the more plentiful vessels departing that port and the numbers may reflect a high concentration of rural seafarers re-classified as urban. This

diaspora is obvious not only in St. John's but in the scores of seafarers signed aboard foreign vessels worldwide whose birthplace is recorded as Newfoundland. [63]

TABLE 2.7: SIGNATURE RATES BY LOCATION AND CAPACITY ENGAGED

	St. John's		Outport		NL/Unknown		TOTAL
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
OFFICERS:							
Master	17	0	100	1	7	0	125
Mate: -	19	1	101	3	8	1	133
2nd	4	1	17	2	3	1	28
3rd	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Engineer: Chief	8	0	2	0	0	0	10
1st	15	0	3	0	0	0	18
2nd	23	0	4	0	0	0	2
3rd	21	0	5	0	0	0	26
4th	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Asst.	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Sub-totals:	118	2	233	6	0	2	379
CREW:							
Bosun	24	16	48	16	0	0	104
Cook	10	13	20	17	1	0	61
Fireman	20	78	19	33	2	1	153
Sailor: -	22	12	192	96	1	1	324
OS	12	9	27	4	1	6	59
AB	63	113	104	92	21	64	457
Steward: Chief	7	0	4	0	0	0	11
/Cook	12	11	44	21	1	3	92
Other	31	4	34	10	0	0	79
Stewardess	5	1	3	3	0	0	12
Unknown/Other	32	27	36	16	2	6	119
Sub-totals:	238	284	531	308	29	81	1,471
TOTALS:	356	286	764	314	47	83	1,850
	642		1,078		130		1,850

[63] Any Newfoundland discussion should recognize the repeated ways that the population has been displaced. This began with denial of permanent settlement for early migratory fishermen, continued with early twentieth-century migration to the United States, prevailed through resettlement programs in the 1960s and 70s, and persists for work in the Fort McMurray, Alberta oil sands and drilling platforms worldwide. Also see Edward Moss and Nicole Power, "Stuck between 'the rock' and a hard place: rural crisis and re-imagining rural Newfoundland feminine subjectivities," *Gender Place and Culture* Vol. 22(1) (2015), 50-66.

The lone outport Master unable to sign aboard ship in my sample begs further discussion. Masters were deemed superior to the crew in many respects and were treated with respect. For confidentiality, the Agreements do not reveal the wages of Masters and, in some cases, the only information recorded is an actual signature. Yet illiterate Masters did command vessels and respect, as the following commentator from Great Britain, Sir Walter Runciman, discloses in reference to two Masters of his acquaintance: "Both of these noble fellows were certificate-of-service men, and both were totally uneducated, and would willingly have suffered a chip being taken out of their own flesh rather than from the ships they loved so fondly. [They] were typical of the best of their class."[64] The Board of Trade instituted competency testing for officers in 1845 and these exams became mandatory in 1850. However, masters with service were considered to be qualified for at least the first generation after certification was introduced.

Runciman further explains why retaining an illiterate master might appeal to a ship owner: "A shrewd, practical man of affairs," by Runciman's account, would reason that "the faculty of letter-writing did not get his ship to and from and out of port expeditiously. He judged his captain by results, and knew he had a masterful man in charge of his property."[65] Runciman wrote of the masters who commanded bulk cargo ships designed to carry coal from North-East English ports in the early to mid-nineteenth century. While their sailing and navigation skills remained paramount later in the century, legislative requirements meant that the vast majority of captains would, in fact, have had to become literate. Valerie Burton discusses the transformation of the shipmaster's

[64] Sir Walter Runciman, *Collier Brigs and Their Sailors*, (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1926), 135.
[65] Runciman, *Collier Brigs and Their Sailors*, 140.

position during the second half of the nineteenth century, arguing that professionalization advanced the social status of the occupation.[66]Regarding the Newfoundland Masters and First Mates in my sample, the majority were able to provide a signature,[67] and the accompanying Log Books present ample evidence of polished penmanship.

The Agreements are an unparalleled archive, not least because this consistently-compiled labour source is unmatched in any other time or place worldwide. Alexander astutely noted that "[I]n the case of seamen the need to sign one's name probably occurred more often than was the case in the vast bulk of manual occupations."[68] However, the archetypal concept of 'seafarer' is a rugged masculine identity,[69] which is forgetful of women. Alexander pointedly coined the term "working men who got wet," but my analysis of Newfoundland crews differs in that there were also "working *women* who got wet," the first appearing in my data set in 1904. Although fewer than their male counterparts, the number of females aboard ship increased throughout the analysis period to 1929. They are considerably older with a median age of 42 and an age range of 21 to 63. These female seafarers signed aboard vessels with a notable overall signature rate of 89.5%, as shown in Table 2.8. The majority were Stewardesses[70] hired to tend fare-

[66] See Valerie Burton, "The Making of a Nineteenth Century Profession: Shipmasters and the British Shipping Industry," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* Vol. 1(1) (1990), 97-118.
[67] There are instances where masters were illiterate, such as Irish-born Captain Matthew Dunn whose son John sailed with him, completing paperwork. See https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/seafarers/johnson/a-signature.php.
[68] Alexander, "Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 6.
[69] See Miriam Wright, "Young Men and Technology: Government Attempts to Create a "Modern" Fisheries Workforce in Newfoundland, 1949-1970," *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 42 (Fall 1998), 143-159; and Nicole Power, "What Do they Call a Fisherman?: *Men, Gender, and Restructuring in the Newfoundland Fishery*, (St. John's: ISER Books, Memorial University of Newfoundland, c2005).
[70] For information on the cultural and occupational aspects of this work see "Narrative of Violet Constance Jessop, Ship's Stewardess" at https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/seafarers/steward-esses/jessop.php.

paying female passengers on large steamships, and earning $35 per month compared with a male Steward's average monthly wages that averaged from $45 to $70.

Table 2.8: Female Seafarers' Signature Rates

Vessel #	Voyage End	Last/First Name	Age	Birthplace	Signature
76363	1904-06-27	Brown, Maud	31	Trinity	Y
76363	1904-06-27	Cullen, Ann May	47	Pooles Island	Y
99890	1911-06-02	McLouchlan, Annie V.	22	St. John's	Y
118120	1925-01-20	Wiseman, Pat	29	St. John's	Y
118120	1926-01-11	Anthoine, Mrs. M.	?	Placentia	Y
118120	1926-01-11	Cunningham, Mrs.	63	St. John's	Y
118120	1930-02-26	Taylor, Miss M.	40	St. John's	N
118129	1919-06-10	Couch, Dora	32	St. John's	Y
118129	1924-07-11	Norman, Mrs.	48	Couches Cove	Y
132505	1929-07-04	Hickey, Nellie	48	Harbour Main	Y
132682	1921-08-25	Noftall, Mrs. M.	38	St. John's	Y
133532	1925-09-03	Bambrick, Mrs.	45	St. John's	Y
138205	1919-12-09	Benson, Leonora	28	Carbonear	Y
142085	1920-06-17	Cook, Elizabeth F.	21	St. John's	Y
133532	1929-01-17	Bambrick, Anna	44	St. John's	Y
133532	1929-01-17	Jackman, Mrs.	61	St. John's	Y
132682	1930-01-16	Hayes, Mrs. Alice	49	St. John's	N
151634	1927-09-09	MacKenzie, Mrs. G.	52	St. John's	Y
151634	1929-09-10	Wyatt, Mrs. H.K.	25	St. John's	Y

There are three women with multiple entries in the Agreements. Mrs. M. Noftall signed aboard the *Sagona* for four voyages between 1920 and 1922. She is the lone Stewardess showing a higher wage of $40 per month. The *Sagona* was a Newfoundland government-owned passenger and freight ferry, mainly used on the northern routes between the island and Labrador. Mrs. Mary Jackman's first voyage was also aboard the *Sagona*. She signed on in 1923 at age 50 and was the most prominent of the group,

appearing in the Agreements on thirteen different crews. Her final recorded voyage in 1930 was aboard the *Glencoe*. Mrs. Alice Hayes signed on five different crews, all aboard the *Sagona*. Her first voyage was in 1925 at age 42, and she re-signed on crews between 1929 and 1932. Consistently, though, her means of signing was an 'x' suggesting illiteracy unless signing on procedures were so varied by gender that she had not been required to turn up with the men. Her peers however were equally consistent in making their signatures. Hayes' and Jackman's wages remained constant throughout at $35 per month. Thirteen of the women list a St. John's birthplace, and eleven of those offered a signature for a rate of 84.6%. Six of the women were from the outports, and all signed aboard for a 100% rate. This geographical variation between St John's and outport locations matches that of male seafarers in Table 2.7, although drawn from a much smaller sample.

The presence of these females aboard ship reveals one weakness in the search parameters for the *Newfoundland and Labrador Crew Lists Database*, reminding us once again of how quickly gender can become an erasing factor. The available search options are seafarer's first and last name, date of voyage termination and the vessel's name and official number. My analysis of 1,850 seafarers contains only twelve of the nineteen women listed in Table 2.8 because of the difficulty finding them in the Agreements during my initial search. It required me to enter 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' in the 'First Name' field before I located some. More women worked as stewardesses on the large passenger steamships, but serendipity played a large part in pinpointing them. They are not currently discoverable if the marriage status option was not entered into either the Agreement or the

database.[71] For example, while searching the Agreement containing Mrs. Pat Wiseman, I found 45-year-old Martha Taylor from Boring Bar (?) who could not provide a signature. While looking for Mrs. M. Anthoine, I discovered 40-year-old Norah Sinnott from Placentia who did sign her name. When I was exploring the Agreements for details of known seafarers, I found several other stewardesses merely by chance because I noticed their occupational status.

By the early 1900s, merchant seafaring provided a few women with a means of earning wages and gaining independence outside the constraints of the family fishery. Many stewardesses were seafarers' widows supporting their family. Ironically, women were more likely to be disparaged as the 'lowest of the low' aboard ship, having to struggle against their identification as women of 'easy virtue' in the predominantly male environment. Economist Ben Fine argues, "social capital may be positive in one instance but negative in another, depending on what, where, whom and how."[72] These women were born into and raised within the same seafaring community as their male counterparts. Yet when they traversed the boundary between shore and sea they encountered a modified habitus in which the form of social capital available to them was altered. While they retained membership in their families and communities, they were isolated within the seagoing workplace and faced barriers that their male shipmates did not, including lower wages. In this case, gender appears to be a limiting factor in the benefits of social capital for seafaring females.

[71] An option to search the database by the "In What Capacity Engaged" field would greatly assist researchers, but it would also be an enormous undertaking for the MHA staff.
[72] Ben Fine, "Social Capital versus Social History," *Social History* Vol. 33 (4) (November 2008), 442-467.

When these women's signatures appear in the Agreements they break though the normatively male conceptualization of seafaring with a presence greater than their numbers. Alexander was investigating a stereotype emerging from the idea of a residuum. That rested on a proposition about recruitment paths for the poorest classes conceived without reference to women's shipboard work or their motives for going to sea. What were their reasons for contemplating this career path? Were there male influences, such as family members working aboard the same vessels? Or were there female influences – could they have been looking for adventure or a steady income in concert with acquaintances or relatives? Perhaps they wanted to choose a different life path than indentured domestic work, if leaving their community was the only option available.[73]

I speculate about social relations and family connections for these females in a way that I have not considered for men. There are more questions than answers in this section because I want to draw attention to the uneven coverage of female seafarers. While the men aboard a vessel commonly acquired knowledge from other seafarers, often through oral transmission, we must consider whether these women acquired more knowledge in the spoken or written form, or in combination. Paradoxically, the women in my sample had literacy levels that compared with those of the Master's and First Mates, considerably higher than many of their 'fellow' crewmates. Another area that should be explored is whether the literate females assisted those seafarers who acquired literacy skills while working aboard ship, perhaps writing letters on their behalf. Miriam Wright and Nicole Power have studied the Newfoundland fishery extensively. While they

[73] See Linda Kealey, "Outport "Girls in Service": Newfoundland in the 1920s and 1930s, *Acadiensis* Vol. 43(2) (Summer/Autumn 2014), 79 – 98. The author employs oral interviews and published memoirs to survey the lives and migration patterns of domestic girls in early nineteenth-century Newfoundland.

navigate the complexity of gender relations, both agree that masculinity is the norm for seafaring and fishing. It is notable that the historiographies which have advanced the questioning of how we conceive of knowledge are disproportionately gender/feminist studies.

Alexander used an educational cohort analysis of non-officer crew to determine the path of literacy growth. Concentrating on crew members aboard Yarmouth vessels, he found that their overall literacy rate improved between 1865 and 1899, although not in a linear progression.[74] Cohort analysis starts with recognizing that the educational make-up of a crew is more complicated than the historian observes in one fixed moment – examining literacy acquisition necessitates a diachronic regression. We must not consider these seafarers only as "working men who got wet," but also project backward to look at their experiences as boys by the particularities of place and time, in this case between the ages of 10 and 14. This is the only category in the Agreements that Alexander analyzed using a life-course technique. This enlarges the maritime historian's capacity to talk about social relations by expanding the number of 'Bourdieuesque" fields. We consider these seafarers simultaneously as children in school and working men, as well as the power relationships that varied with each situation. Adapting Alexander's educational cohort analysis became a crucial part of my evaluation of seafarers' literacy acquisition.

For example, assuming that children acquired literacy skills between the ages of ten and fourteen, the peak school years for a seafarer in the 20-24 year age group working aboard a vessel in 1860-1864 would have been 1850-54. To compare Newfoundland seafarer's literacy rates with the overall school-aged population, I limit this analysis to

[74] Alexander, "Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 14.

non-officer Newfoundland-born seafarers aged fifteen to fifty-nine. In each decade before 1890, an average of only one-third of the sampled seafarers in the educational cohorts in Table 2.9 would eventually provide a signature when signing aboard. Although there is a relatively steady increase in signature rates throughout the period, they only surpass 40% from 1880 onwards. These are dismal rates over fifty years, and it is only by the late 1880s that close to half of the future seafarers would have the ability to sign their name. We learn from comparing these rates with McCann's school enrolment figures that, while 27.9% of the school-aged population was enrolled in 1861, a mere 7.5% met advanced Board reading standards.[75] The Newfoundland seafarers in my cohort analysis for the same period eventually signed aboard with a 33% rate, which is curiously close to the corresponding attendance rate, but almost five times higher than the competency rates.

TABLE 2.9: SEAFARERS' SIGNATURE RATES BY EDUCATIONAL COHORT – 1835-1889

Year	# Yes	# No	%Yes	%No
1835-39	1	9	10	90
1840-44	2	13	13	87
1845-49	11	22	33	67
1850-54	17	36	32	68
1855-59	32	55	37	63
1860-64	24	48	33	67
1865-69	19	33	36.5	63.5
1870-74	17	37	31.5	68.5
1875-79	19	34	36	64
1880-84	29	43	40	60
1885-89	31	35	47	53
TOTAL:	202	365	35.5%	64.5%

[75] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*, (St. John's, 1994), 124-125, 262. Statistics on writing ability is only available for 1871 so I have used reading statistics as an indicator or literacy.

For those seafarers in my analysis whose period of schooling happened from 1890, shown in Table 2.10, literacy rates invert when compared to earlier groups. A higher percentage of seafarers in this period provided a signature, while an average of one third marked with an 'x.' This abrupt reversal of rates is significant because signature rates remained higher for the remainder of the analysis period. In considering McCann's attendance rates, in 1906 52.9% of children in the colony aged five to fifteen were enrolled in school, and a shockingly low 6.8% met advanced reading standards.[76] Seafarers in the same educational cohort had a signature rate of 70.5%. Overall, the total signature rate of the 1,464 Newfoundland seafarers for the cohort period 1835 to 1924 is 51%. Based on these proportions, either the children who went on to work as merchant seafarers later in life were considerably more literate than their classmates, or an ability to sign their name does not, in fact, reflect reading and writing competency for many. The latter conclusion seems the most likely.

TABLE 2.10: SEAFARERS' SIGNATURE RATE BY EDUCATIONAL COHORT – 1890-1924

Year	# Yes	# No	%Yes	%No
1890-94*	74	54	58	42
1895-99	73	49	60	40
1900-04	113	67	63	37
1905-09	162	68	70.5	29.5
1910-14	112	38	74.5	25.5
1915-19	58	10	85	15
1920-24	11	8	58	42
TOTAL:	603	294	67%	33%

* Point from which more seafarers continually provided a signature than an 'x'

[76] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*, (St. John's, 1994), 124-125, 262.

How do the educational cohort literacy rates compare to the crew members on Yarmouth vessels (excluding officers) that Alexander treated? He found evidence that the Canadian crew literacy rates for the cohorts schooled between 1835 and 1884 rose from 55% to 95% and the foreign crew's rates increased from 52% to 92%.[77] Both of these groups had considerably higher cohort signature rates than the Newfoundland seafarers' rates of 10% to 40% in my analysis during the same period. Alexander qualified his results by stating that the group numbers were too small to be statistically significant. My sample of 1,850 Newfoundland seafarers contains 324 Sailors and 457 Able-bodied Seamen, a more representative group than the 85 Newfoundland seafarers in his sample. My results confirm his identification of Newfoundland seafarers as among the least literate of the globally-constituted Yarmouth crews holds across the analysis period. Nevertheless, commencing with the 1890-94 cohort, Newfoundland seafarers' literacy rates increased substantially, more closely mirroring those of the seafarers fifty years prior in Alexander's cohort analysis. We might infer that attempts to provide Newfoundland children with literacy skills were making progress, albeit more gradually than in many nations. I now move into a discussion of some of the methods used to help children acquire reading and writing skills outside the sphere of formal education.

2.5) Fishing Season – School Interrupted

Prolonged education was not the only method for, or indicator of, seafarers' literacy acquisition. *On Sloping Ground* is a first-hand account of life in Notre Dame Bay

[77] Alexander, "Literacy Among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 13.

in the early twentieth century. Written in the late 1970s during a period of renewed interest in preserving reminiscences and family histories in the province, its author Aubrey Tizzard recounts that his family fished inshore for food and his grandfather was a crewmember on the *Eagle* in 1878. His mother earned cash one summer drying fish brought from Labrador, her only foray drying cod because she found it was a substantial amount of work for low wages. This comment indicates that his family may have been somewhat more economically stable than other families in which women had no choice but to work drying fish. Importantly, Tizzard emphasized that although neither his grandfather nor father attended a school they both could read and write. His grandfather "learnt his first letters from the head of a Windsor patent flour barrel,"[78] while his father bought several 'copybooks' at age twenty and became proficient in both reading and writing. This is one example that illustrates Newfoundland seafarers at the turn of the century acquired literacy skills outside of the classroom, at varying ages and by any method available. Therefore, it is plausible that more adult Newfoundlanders could eventually read and write than the school attendance rates suggest.

While the oral tradition was respected, literacy acquisition was still thought a noteworthy accomplishment. Tizzard was extremely proud that his self-taught grandfather and father both worked as the local postmaster, a job that called for correspondence with college-educated superiors, members of parliament and lawyers, among others. The author's education was postponed by illness in Grade X, but he "sent for every free book

[78] Aubrey M. Tizzard, *On Sloping Ground. Reminiscences of Outport Life in Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland*, (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979), 9.

that was ever advertised in a magazine or newspaper"[79] to maintain his reading skills. A person preserves reading and writing skills through usage. We cannot assume that children were able to read or write because they were registered as attending school up to an age when literacy might be expected. Nor should we assume that this correlates to their retaining those skills throughout adulthood. As Alexander speculated, "some fraction of the crew who signed had learned this simple skill while never acquiring, or forgetting through infrequent use, the more general skills of literacy."[80] How then were they able to find work, and have captains commonly rate their conduct and seamanship skills as very good? Life's practical education better equipped seafarers for most workplace activities.

2.6) Functional Knowledge

Oral tradition was ingrained in many Newfoundland outports, and oral communication sufficed in most circumstances. A few residents who could read and write were able to meet the balance of a community's needs when textual skills were required. An autobiography that reveals the interplay of formal education and functional knowledge in the colony in the early 1900s is *Fifty Years of My Life in Newfoundland.* Author Joshua Stansford describes in vivid detail his first fishing forays with Skipper William Stansford (no relative) learning to jig, store the catch and then split and salt it upon returning to shore. Although he attended school (Primer Class) in April and May of 1905, after school hours he worked preparing reels, lines, hooks and leads for the summer fishing season. He began fishing full time in June (finally learning to bait a hook

[79] Tizzard, *On Sloping Ground*, 127.
[80] Alexander, "Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen, 1863-1899," 6.

properly) and fished until mid-September when he returned to school. He "worked hard … to end up at the top" of his class, leaving in March of 1906 to haul wood and then continue directly into the fishery until November. During that winter he "learned No's. 2 and 3, and then went on to No. 4 Royal Reader," and continued to be among the top students in the class. However, this was his final winter in school, and he received a total of eighteen month's education. Nevertheless, he mentions at several points in his account that later in life he would read his old school books in the evening after a day of fishing or hauling wood.[81]

Newfoundland educator Dennis Mulcahy traced the processes of formal and informal education in the early 1900s in a small Newfoundland outport. The importance of the informal transmission of knowledge is unmistakable in one resident's statement that school started at age six, but learning how to be a fisherman began at birth. All areas of the community were *de facto* classrooms, where the "seasoned professionals, knowledgeable and wise in the ways of the sea and the land"[82] taught the boys through observation, demonstration, participation and practice. The focal point of the community was the fishing store, "a place of activity, dialogue and story-telling,"[83] where most knowledge was conveyed orally, through informal conversations and specific instructional narratives. An oral culture developed and endured despite, or perhaps in part because of, the irregular access to formal education and sporadic instruction in

[81] Joshua Stansford, *Fifty Years of My Life in Newfoundland*, (Ilfracombe: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., c1950), 9-15.
[82] Dennis M. Mulcahy, "Fishing and Informal Education in Fair Haven, Placentia Bay 1911-1958," *Newfoundland Studies* Vol. 11(2) (1995), 298.
[83] Mulcahy, "Fishing and Informal Education in Fair Haven, Placentia Bay 1911-1958," 300.

reading and writing. According to Alexander, "[s]ince illiteracy was so pervasive in Newfoundland it is unlikely that many regarded it as a matter of social stigma."[84]

Newfoundland intellectual Patrick O'Flaherty made a case for the importance of functional knowledge in *Lost Country,* a narrative history focusing on politics. Refuting the claim that higher literacy and education rates would have made Newfoundland working class people more productive, O'Flaherty argues that islanders reached the level of education necessary to function in their society. He states that although many people received little education, they were, by and large, far from ignorant. Fishermen were informally taught or learned by experience the skills necessary to capably perform their work.[85] He maintains that: "[T]here are men in plenty who without being able to read and write can make a model of a schooner, build the vessel according to scale, and then sail her as master."[86] If a task called for basic literacy, someone was found to assist. He reasons that this was an understandable and rational response to their circumstances, and had further education been necessary then people would have acquired it.

Colonial Newfoundland was an unequal society where the wealthy and powerful maintained their social standing by furthering their children's education and careers. Canada's newest province remained a class-divided society in the 1970s when Story sharply criticized the formal education system. He claimed that it was elitist, exploitative and discriminatory, and observed that the majority of children struggled for education in

[84] David Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland," *Acadiensis* Vol. 10(1) (Autumn 1980), 8, fn. 13.
[85] Patrick O'Flaherty, *Lost Country, The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843-1933* (St. John's, 2005), 212. Some of the skills listed are: "how to knit twine and set cod traps, or, after 1907, how to operate and repair gasoline engines and to fit punts to use them; how to splice rope, bind graplins, read weather signs, read tides, build boats, stages and flakes, find shoals, set trawls, rig sails, make cast-nets, cure fish and do many other intricate tasks, none of which required literacy."
[86] O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 213, fn. 12 from a letter cited in *The Evening Mercury*.

overcrowded one-room schools with poorly trained teachers. As Alexander's confidante, Story further complained that Newfoundland's existing educational system was designed to supply "trained manpower for the resource crunching engines of industrial enterprise or the purveyors of service to a passive consumer society."[87] Disavowing an education tied to marketable skills as narrowly defined by business, Story contemplated the non-market value of education. Alexander's perspective coincided with that of Story, and he insisted that the province must expect its residents "can do more than provide semi-skilled labour and middle-management for international corporations."[88] He believed that equipping citizens with the skills to progress beyond merely 'making a living' was the key to both personal growth and economic expansion.

Why was the (il)literacy of Newfoundland's population such a pivotal topic for Alexander? In the 1970s, UNESCO was one of many international organizations embracing a functional literacy model of education in which people acquired reading, writing and mathematical skills at a level that prepared them "for a social, civic and economic role that goes beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training."[89] Educators and governments viewed literacy as a necessary condition for economic growth and development, and characterized a functionally literate person as one able to effectively function in and contribute to the development of their community by engaging in activities which required literacy. Conversely, while the broad definition of illiteracy is an

[87] Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," 351-354.
[88] David Alexander, "Development and Dependence in Newfoundland," in *Atlantic Canada and Confederation: Essays in Canadian Political Economy*, compiled by Lewis R. Fischer et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 25.
[89] "Global Monitoring Education for All Report 2006," UNESCO, 153. (accessed February 1, 2018 at http://www.unesco.org/education/GMR2006/full/chapt6_eng.pdf.)

inability to read or write simple sentences, 'functional illiteracy" is an inadequacy in these basic skills that affects a person's daily personal and working life.

Bourdieu and fellow sociologist Jean-Claude Passeron elaborate on the term social capital, referring to the connections within and between social networks where an individual's social and economic standing improves by way of benefits accessed through the group.[90] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the vast majority of Newfoundlanders were born in seafaring communities to families of little means. As there were few avenues of social mobility, parents saw no advantage to prolonging their offspring's time in school. Working-age boys went to sea, and one of the few choices available to them was whether they remained in the inshore fishery or moved on to jobs further offshore. A lack of education, specifically reading and writing skills, did not hinder them in accessing seafaring jobs. Therefore, they were not functionally illiterate as they were able to perform very capably in their personal and working lives. Our understanding of 'illiteracy' and its correlation to Newfoundlanders' socio-cultural and working lives has progressed significantly since historians' cliometric studies of the 1970s.

Knowledge encompasses much more than just information – it incorporates observations and experiences. Standard practices that have been proven successful over generations are shared and revised as new information and technologies become available. Although colonial officials and bureaucrats considered local knowledge to be primitive and therefore worthless, perceptions are slowly changing. In the wake of the

[90] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture,* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 176, fn. 44.

precipitous decline of cod stocks following the 1992 moratorium[91] in Newfoundland, there is a new respect for the importance of local knowledge, evidenced in such work as that of Barbara Neis and John Lutz.[92] They focus on the intersection of fishermen's ecological knowledge with science in conceiving recommendations for rebuilding collapsed fisheries and threatened communities. On the basis of Neis' Newfoundland work, they contend that knowledge exists in a social context, in a specific place where a 'knower' has the relevant experience to interpret and disseminate information. This argument is substantiated in the accounts provided by Mulcahy's outport community interviewees and by the seafaring autobiographer Stansford.

Literacy matters for university researchers, but many at Memorial also hold the conviction that long-term solutions can only emerge when traditional expertise becomes part of the discourse. Detailing working men's and women's agency in seeking employment following the moratorium, Nicole Power weighs in on the subject in *What Do They Call a Fisherman?* She found evidence that local workers "tended to invert the official hierarchy of knowledge that placed formal ways of knowing on top."[93] Government officials and 'experts' used their official information to try to solve local problems. However, the outport residents believed their locally-acquired knowledge and practices that had been transmitted from generation to generation were much more useful.

Recently, artist and educator Pam Hall worked with residents of Newfoundland communities to overturn the usual hierarchy of knowledge-making. Her interest lies in

[91] The Canadian Federal government passed the moratorium, displacing 50,000 workers and decimating hundreds of communities.
[92] Sutton Lutz and Neis (eds.) *Making and Moving Knowledge. Interdisciplinary and Community-based Research in a World on the Edge*, 8.
[93] Power, *What Do They Call a Fisherman?*, 109.

knowledge production and social and vernacular practice, and she profiles the marginalized 'knowers' and knowledge practices in navigating every day changing environments.[94] Contemplating that the term 'local' generally implies fixed temporality and spatiality and is therefore immovable, she argues that social scientists now appreciate that local knowledges are not in fact isolated from interaction with dominant knowledge systems – they are simultaneously local and global. The local knowledge that outport Newfoundland seafarers acquired in their communities travelled the world with them on their voyages, and the practical skills gained as young men in the in-shore fishery were highly transferable in navigating maritime environments that changed hourly. Additionally, Hall's work is to the point of Henry Graff's revisionist persuasion that literacy and progress are not linearly aligned which is a singularly important observation to bring to Newfoundland.

Scholarly works such as those discussed above reveal knowledge gained in the community and working the inshore fishery from childhood prepared the majority of seafarers to transition to ocean-going voyages easily. Many seafarers provided for their families and attempted to improve their social and economic position without writing skills. For those unable to 'sign' aboard a vessel, they met contractual obligations with a simple 'x.' In an effort to integrate human dimensions with the mass of data generated from my Agreement analysis, I will now move to a discussion of four specific Newfoundland seafarers. My aim is to more comprehensively consider the illiteracy dilemma by reporting what I heard on their tape-recorded oral histories. Their stories

[94] Pam Hall, *Recruiting the Visual*: *knowing our commonplace towards an encyclopedia of local knowledge*, Ph.D. Thesis. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2013).

contribute to our understanding of the various ways in which seafarers acquired knowledge in their social and working lives.

CHAPTER 3. SEAFARERS AND THEIR STORIES

3.1) Introducing MUNFLA

While MUNFLA contains a significant collection of sound recordings, manuscripts, artifacts and photographs about Newfoundland folk culture,[95] it is the tape-recorded student interviews with seafarers completed for MUN courses that provide my materials.[96] My use of the interviews with four master mariners requires context, for MUNFLA's presence on a University campus is as unusual as that of the MHA. That these recordings came to be collected and preserved is testimony to a close association between scholars and students, and the communities from which the latter came. In the 1950s academics at the University became interested in the province's folklore. Members of the English Language and Literature department, E.R. Seary and G.M. Story, led with an interest in the dialect, toponymy and folklore of the less-accessible areas of the province.[97] As the students' collection of taped and written interviews grew, the University hired Neil Rosenberg in 1968 to supervise the organization of MUNFLA. The archive became one of the most significant stores of folklore material anywhere in the world. Its primary mission continues to be the collecting, organizing, indexing and transcribing of material to preserve Newfoundland's traditional culture and make it accessible to researchers.

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[95] Herbert Halpert and Neil V. Rosenberg, *Folklore Studies at Memorial University: Two Reports*, (St. John's: Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Reprint Series (4), 1978), 6.
[96] These interviews were initially tape-recorded, and have never been digitalized.
[97] Halpert and Rosenberg, *Folklore Studies at Memorial University: Two Reports*, 2. (E.R. Seary came to Memorial as Department Head of English Language and Literature, together with G.M. Story, a Newfoundlander trained in Renaissance studies at Oxford.)

3.2) Seafarers' Oral Accounts

Despite the rich oral history and tradition of our province, relatively few researchers have explored maritime labour through the oral accounts of the seafarers who traditionally comprised the bulk of our workforce. Ordinary people often have difficulty believing that others are interested in their story, assuming that history is more about the 'Great Man/Significant Event' premise. However, oral history is built around the lives of the popular classes. Ex-seafarer Tony Lane embraced an oral history approach to seafaring work. *Grey Dawn Breaking* is his exploration of the merchant marine using British seafarer's oral accounts. Lane bolsters my argument that "in their everyday lives people do not as a rule think of themselves as historical actors, pushed and propelled by structural forces which are beyond their individual reach and control."[98] Yet oral history allows the listener to hear a lifetime's narrative in a person's voice. It is the nuance, the intonation and the explanation that illustrate ordinary people are historical as much for their particularity as for their generality.

Additional literature we can draw upon comes from the British Isles, done by the eminent oral historian Paul Thompson and his then-student, Trevor Lummis. Thompson is internationally recognized as a pioneer of the use of oral history and life story interviews in social research, writing the international classic on the method, *The Voice of the Past*.[99] He observed that personal, local and unofficial documents are not part of the state apparatus and therefore unlikely to be preserved. Fortunately for my

[98] Tony Lane, *Grey Dawn Breaking: British Merchant Seafarers in the Late Twentieth Century*, (London: Manchester University Press, c1896), 4.
[99] "Pioneer Details. Paul Thompson," *United Kingdom Data Service*, University of Manchester. (accessed December 8, 2017 at https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/pioneers/pioneer-detail?id=pioneer_people_thompson.)

research, the comprehensive work of MUN Folklore and English students offers an exception to this case. Even in seafaring, oral records are useful in revealing individuals' emotional and intellectual reactions to events as an alternative to officially generated sources. Thus, they allow for a "multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated."[100] With their emotive and somatic dimensions, an historian's interpretive capacities are exercised around the humanity of their subject, thus enriching the understanding of patterns of social and cultural transformation. I chose to complement my analysis of Newfoundland seafarers in the Agreements by employing an oral history methodology for these reasons.

Thompson was interested in the social science analysis of Scottish fishermen's community and family life – notably in its connection with religion. His *Living the Fishing*,[101] in concert with Lummis and Tony Wailey, attracted oral historians of the period to fishing and is considered a landmark study of a fishing economy. Lummis had a personal reason for taking up research in the field. He joined the merchant navy at seventeen and travelled the world as an able seaman. He was later recognized as one of the first to apply computer archiving to oral history projects.[102] Lummis insists that one advantage of oral history is the interviewee's active intervention in recording an individual's experience. "It is this which should ensure that a testimony which is uniquely valuable in itself gains added value by contributing its information and insights to a

[100] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). 5.
[101] Paul Thompson with Tony Wailey and Trevor Lummis, *Living the Fishing*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).
[102] "Trevor Lummis Obituary," *The Telegraph*, October 8, 2013. (accessed November 23, 2017 at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/books-obituaries/10365001/Trevor-Lummis.html.)

systematic collection of material."[103] The interview is more beneficial because it is the product of two people, the result of their interaction and not the product of one person recording their thoughts in isolation. This is evident in the four outport Newfoundland seafarers' oral histories that follow. Family members conducted the interviews used in this paper, in the homes of these seafarers. Both parties had comfort and familiarity in the give and take of interviewing. As well, these were not strangers who had come to town for a short period to gather facts and then return to their university offices. Interviewer and interviewee shared understandings of their family history and outport life. However, one of the drawbacks is the seafarers may have drawn limits around some subjects or declined to have some stories recorded for posterity.

Significantly, the oral history studies mentioned above were completed between three and four decades ago, and it is time to make use of the oral history gathered in outports to advance our understanding of work commonly done by Newfoundland seafarers but remarkably challenging for outsiders to "fix" in its material and somatic elements. These seafarers may never have imagined that an academic would carefully appraise their accounts decades later. Permitting students to record their oral history gives the present-day historian a glimpse of the daily routines and special occasions of a bygone era. In listening to their accounts, I aimed to recapture the techniques these master mariners employed to acquire knowledge and experience. As life-long seafarers, their observations are revealing of the value of orally transmitted knowledge and shipboard vernacular.

[103] Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 22.

3.3) Memory

When Lummis discusses what skeptics think of oral history, he argues that most of the doubts are tied to the nature of memory and whether the past can be "remembered as a mirror image or is reshaped and reconstructed through time as we grow to have new values, attitudes and perspectives."[104] This is to place oral history in the larger space of the temporalities of the past and how a society understands "its" history. Lummis argues that oral accounts may be enhanced when used in conjunction with documents, but the main limitation is that we can only interview those still alive. Oral historians approach testimony as a narrative that speaks to the interplay between experience and present recollection.[105] They recognize it as inescapable that people recall events through a social or political awareness in the present, and memory may be filtered as much as constructed.

Lummis makes an important observation in stating that oral history must be separated from 'oral tradition' because "tradition's major focus is on the past beyond the recall of one lifespan. It is what someone has been told, and [is] not about their personal experiences."[106] In this section of my thesis I will address the vitality, ubiquity and utility of an oral tradition in Newfoundland. In contrast to oral tradition, oral history presents past events in a person's lifetime in their own language. Oral histories reveal how people derive meaning from the past to make sense of their lives. Recent physiological memory studies confirm the fundamental reliability of memory. Valerie Yow explains that people choose memories important to them: "Older people have richer vocabularies, can call on

[104] Lummis, *Listening to History*, 12.
[105] Joan Tumblety (ed.), *Memory and History. Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.
[106] Lummis, *Listening to History*, 26.

wide networks of facts and associations and have rehearsed salient memories repeatedly."[107] Therefore, the seafarers' accounts used in this study reveal what these men thought was important, what they have chosen to reiterate, and why it has become central to the narrative of their lives. Retold on many occasions, stories of trips to foreign countries or stormy nights seeking safety in sheltered coves retain an immediacy that makes them so much more than just a distant memory.

Perhaps oral tradition and oral history are not so far apart where popular-class communication is strongly oral and where the formal record requires formidable detail of aspects of work that are otherwise neglected in documents. Lummis opines that documentary sources and oral evidence rarely give direct confirmation: "Even when there is some congruence with documentary evidence, the oral evidence rarely covers the same ground or illuminates the same area of historical interest."[108] What is unexpected about the particular research for this paper is the extent I was able to verify evidence through cross-referencing the oral accounts with corresponding Agreements. This explains how the method and findings of this paper bear on what we understand as the possibilities for writing the history of Newfoundland seafaring by integrating oral and documentary sources.

[107] Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History. A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Second Edition* (Toronto: Altamira Press, 2005), 38.
[108] Lummis, *Listening to History*, 76.

3.4) Master Mariners

There are a plethora of oral histories available at MUNFLA. I concentrate on four seafaring captains, making this choice due to the quality and quantity of information contained in their recordings. I should reiterate my comment in Chapter 1 that these four all became master mariners and that their literacy skills differentiated their opportunities from other seafarers with poor or no literacy skills. Nevertheless, several of the interviewees provide accounts of their early years aboard ship and 'learning the ropes' from other seafarers and captains. They each became a master of small-scale vessels with relatively few crew members. Their observations of a lifetime at sea are of a shipboard world in which all the crew shared, and are therefore revealing of seafaring life at the turn of the century. For each man, corroborating Agreement records are held at the MHA which are vital in tracking the careers of individual seafarers, particularly masters who are cross-indexed in several databases. Agreements track men practically every time they showed up for work and I use them to substantiate that the voyages and vessels were as the seafarers recalled. My Agreement analyses produced evidence which corroborates accounts in the oral history of these master mariners, and their oral accounts in turn animate the written records.

Seafarers often conjured an image of "heroism in the face of ... danger, of the sea itself, and the struggle of mankind with the elements."[109] In an exceptionally hazardous occupation, sailors developed a mutual dependence on their workmates, in a setting that continually changed during every season and removed them from home and family for extended periods. According to Lummis, accounts of work are central in people's

[109] Thompson, Wailey and Lummis, *Living the Fishing*, 2.

descriptions of their life experiences. Although seafarers may have compartmentalized their memories of work, we should realize that work was not separate from their larger social relationships. Seafaring shaped the home lives of these four seafarers, as well as the daily routines of their wives, children and other family members. Seafaring influenced every aspect of their life, not just in the workplace. However, while they may be viewed as typical, there is no sense in which these four are offered as a representative sample.

I first present a biographical digest of each subject to which the reader can refer for context as more material gathered from the seafarers is provided and analyzed. Together their histories reveal that each entered the family fishery as young children, directly contributed to the household upkeep with their labour, and made their way as professional seafarers by learning the ropes from seasoned Captains and crewmembers. Although stratified by class, religion and ancestry, they shared many similar experiences as they left school, got married, had children and advanced through the ranks in their maritime workplace in the early twentieth century. These four men perceived a seafaring career as an opportunity to provide for their families and improve their social and economic position by reaching the rank of shipmaster. Their accounts reveal the interplay of early schooling and local knowledge acquired in the community along with their secondary education as adults and the functional knowledge acquired aboard ship. Each man adds a discrete perspective to the discussion of literacy, orality and functional knowledge.

Born in 1899 on Groas Island off the Northern Peninsula, Fergus Foley first went to sea at fifteen as a sealer on the *Viking* in 1915. He fished in the Grey Islands that summer, and then signed on the *Nellie M* departing for Greece with 5,000 quintals of bulk

Labrador fish. [110] The *Nellie M*, O.N. 113047, was a 231-ton schooner built in Burnt Bay, Newfoundland in 1899 with W. S. Munroe as the registered owner (hence the "M"), and one of several in his fish-carrying fleet built by Newfoundland craftsmen.[111] Foley also recounts later voyages to Europe, the Caribbean and Brazil aboard the *Clutha*, *Clementine* and *Donure.* He had an exceptional recall of events, including daily work routines and wartime adventures in the Mediterranean area. His contribution provides information on the acquisition of knowledge aboard ship, and the workplace interactions of seafarers.

Born in 1913 in Safe Harbour, Bonavista Bay, Albert Blackwood, began fishing with his father at ten. He did not receive wages because all earnings went to support the family, although he recalls getting a new pair of pants one summer. At sixteen, he travelled to Ungava Bay and Pond's Inlet with Captain Isaac Barbour on the *Fort James.*[112] Although no Agreement exists for this trip, eighteen-year-old Blackwood appears in an Agreement for the same vessel O.N. 150805, with the same captain, terminating on November 5, 1931. At nineteen, Blackwood became Master of the *Short Wave*, a Labrador fishing schooner. His wife taught at the local school and, in her portion of the interview, she contends that their community differed from other outport towns because education was essential, and a high percentage of young people left home to complete post-secondary school. For these four seafarers, she is the lone spouse

[110] Jack Foley, *Recording of Fergus Foley Talking About His Life at Sea*, MUNFLA F7639c/C7609. Accession #85-123. (Recorded June 22, 1974).
[111] Joseph Prim and Michael J. McCarthy, *Men Against the Sea*. *Ships Lost in the Newfoundland Foreign Trade*, (St. John's: Flanker Press, 2004), Appendix I, 72: "Her performance gave the lie to the rumour that Newfoundland-built vessels were inferior to those built abroad of soft-wood construction."
[112] Jeanette Blackwood, *The Lives of Captain and Mrs. Albert Blackwood in Safe Harbour*. MUNFLA F10096c-10097c/C9491-9492. Accession #81-426. Folklore 3420 (Winter 1981).

interviewed. A significant amount of valuable information (and context) has likely been lost due to interviewers not including more spouses and family members.

Born April 6, 1915, in Coley's Point, Bay Roberts, Conception Bay, Anglican William Russell first went to sea in 1930. He hired on a schooner bound for Labrador as a messenger boy doing odd jobs like sawing wood and cleaning decks. [113] He subsequently sailed on the *Norma L. Conrad* with Captain Stephen Parsons of Bay Roberts delivering logs (used for minesweeping) to St. Lawrence.[114] Although there are no records for the Official Ship #138256 in the MHA Crew Agreement Database, the Crew List Index Project (CLIP), a database of British ships and seafarers, confirms that Captain Parsons owned this ship built in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia in 1916. Russell calls the Agreements a 'shipping paper' and described work as being 'in collar.'[115] He worked with several Captains hauling bulk herring to Halifax, at the Labrador fishery, and on freighters around the eastern seaboard. He provides excellent details of the later education that was necessary to receive his Master's papers.

Born in 1923 in Bar Haven, Placentia Bay, the youngest seafarer Patrick Hickey obtained a grade six education and began fishing at fifteen in a dory off Cape St. Mary's. He worked on a whaler, at bank fishing and on Canadian National coastal boats as a

[113] William Russell, *The Role of Sea Captain in the Life of Billy Russell*, MUNFLA F14204c/C12691. Accession #86-308. Folklore 2000 (Winter 1986).
[114] Russell explains that mine sweepers were being built in Canada and the round timber was used for launch waves that were used to launch ships into the water.
[115] See *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, "Collar." This meant going into service aboard a ship, and when a voyage was over the seafarer would be "out of collar." More commonly used in sealing and the fishery. In the earliest days of the colony a proverbial rhyme was "The first of May is Collar Day. When you're shipped you must obey. When you're tied you can't run away." (accessed February 10, 2019 at https://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/a-z-index.php#969.)

deckhand later in life, travelling to the United States, Canada and South America.[116] He discussed the change from old "make and break" gasoline engines to coal-fired steam engines as beneficial, but states that he preferred the later, less-problematic, diesel engines. It was his statement about attending school only two months in the summer with the rest of the year off that led to my discovery of the School Superintendent records. These records confirm that many children attended school when a teacher and a school were available, the weather permitted, and they were not at the family fishery (boys) or household work (girls). To fill the gaps in existing Newfoundland seafaring narratives, I will now survey formal education and practical experience. The seafarers' oral histories will provide the evidence.

3.5) Seafarers' Formal Education

For most of its history, the education system in Newfoundland entwined the state and church: the three major churches owned all schools but derived their rights from the state through legislation. They largely depended on state grants for school construction and maintenance. The many economic, geographic and religious factors somewhat decentralized the authority of the St. John's-based churches and government[117] because local problems in isolated regions required local solutions. In 1900, less than fifty percent of Newfoundland children between the ages of five and fifteen were attending school, and standards in the "Three Rs" (reading, writing and arithmetic) were low. Expenditure on

[116] Annemarie Flynn, *The Role of Tradition in the Personal Life History of Patrick Hickey, Seaman*, MUNFLA F10210-10211c/C9603-9604. Accession #81-616. Folklore 1000 (Fall 1981).
[117] Frederick W. Rowe, *The Development of Education in Newfoundland,* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1964), Introduction, 1.

public elementary education amounted to only five percent of total government expenditure, the lowest since 1861.[118] The reasons for this were twofold. Fishermen had little or no discretionary cash to purchase items, most of which were subject to customs dues and these dues were the primary source of government revenue. Without this revenue, the government had few funds for education expenditures, and the available amounts decreased throughout the nineteenth century.[119] Secondly, the government was trying to attract capital for economic diversification and modernization schemes, such as the island-wide railway. Education levels declined with decreasing education funds that were spread over an increasing number of schools.[120]

To make matters worse, many certified teachers left the profession as economic diversification created more lucrative jobs in mining, forestry and the railway. The situation remained relatively the same for the next quarter century when the Avalon Annual School Board Reports for 1919-1925 suggest primary school attendance rates of only 58.22%. Some schools were open less than the four quarters per year. For example, the Reports indicate that summer schools were conducted at Granby's Island, Gales Cove and Browns Cove.[121] This supports Patrick Hickey's statement that he only went to school for two months in the summer and had the rest of the year off. The operation of summer schools is evident throughout the period covered by this thesis. Recalling Mr.

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[118] "Final Report," *Newfoundland Department of Education Annual Reports 1919-1925* (St. John's: *The Daily Star*), 1926.
[119] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volumes*, Table II, 65, 217.
[120] Phillip McCann, "Introduction," *Newfoundland Studies* Vol. 11(2), (1995), Special Topic Issue, Education and Society, 172 – 178.
[121] "Final Report," *Newfoundland Department of Education Annual Reports 1919-1925*, v. "For Church of England schools, few if any places do not have a school in operation for at least a part of every year – in most cases for the full year."

Kelly, the teacher from Chapter 2.1 above, he also taught school in the summer of 1859 even though most of his students were away at the Labrador fishery.

In his articles on literacy and its relationship to economic development, at no point does Alexander write about women's substantial economic contributions or their role in helping seafarers gain and retain reading and writing skills. By the last decades of the 1800s women in Newfoundland had reached the surprising state of being more literate than men,[122] if only marginally. McCann attributed this to girls' higher school attendance rates coupled with a longer period in the classroom and fewer interruptions to schooling than boys. The percentages of boys enrolled in public elementary schools across the colony slowly declined from 61.2% in 1861 to 53.4% in 1906, while girls' enrollment rates gradually increased from 38.8% in 1861 to 46.6% in 1906,[123] and girls' rates continued to rise in comparison to boys. It is remarkable that girls had higher literacy rates when we consider their dreadfully low enrollment rates. Local school boards hired female teachers because they were paid a smaller salary and "possessed a greater share of the qualities of patience, sympathy, sensibility, courtesy and kindness than men."[124] By 1901, 59.9% of teachers in Newfoundland were female,[125] and women were instrumental in teaching reading and writing skills to the colony's children.

The church and school emerge from the oral history interviews as very important in bringing people together in a common bond of planning and the fulfillment of responsibility. Blackwood recounts that "The social events of Safe Harbour were

[122] McCann, *Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education*, 8 and Table 1-1.
[123] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*, 108-109, 258.
[124] McCann, *Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education, 1836-1901*, Table 2 and p. 18.
[125] McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume Tables*, 77.

concentrated in the winter months when the men would be back from the Labrador coast."[126] His wife taught in a one-room school, and she emphasized that all of her siblings graduated high school. Declaring that teaching was a hard life, she talks about arriving early in the morning before classes began to light the stove for her thirty or so students.[127] On the average teacher's monthly salary of $19.28 with another $50 supplement from the government every three months,[128] she also taught Sunday school and organized concerts and the Young People's Church League. Teachers had many responsibilities outside of the classroom, and it appears that they had a full weekly schedule. Teaching was a means of social advancement and independence for females, but once married they were generally expected to resign their posts. Sociologist Marilyn Porter (2014) surveyed gender relations in Newfoundland, including the role of gender in education. Finding that many outport females would complete teacher training in St. John's, "teaching represented one of the very few avenues of employment for capable and ambitious young women."[129] However, she also acknowledged that the majority would teach for a few years in outport schools and then leave the profession upon marrying.

[126] Blackwood, *The Lives of Captain and Mrs. Albert Blackwood in Safe Harbour*. Transcript, 30.
[127] Blackwood, *The Lives of Captain and Mrs. Albert Blackwood in Safe Harbour*, Transcript, 21.
[128] "Final Report," *Newfoundland Department of Education Annual Reports 1919-1925*, vi. This amount corresponds with the "Average Annual Salary Male teachers - $548.00; Female teachers - $322.00."
[129] Marilyn Porter and Linda Cullum (eds.), "'She Knows Who She Is': Educating Girls to Their Place in Society," in *Creating This Place: Women, Family, and Class in St. John's, 1900 – 1950*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 156.

3.6) Navigation Schools

In many of the outports, people with some degree of education and a sense of duty to the less fortunate commonly set up informal schools in their homes.[130] Oral respondent Russell reveals a compelling counter-narrative to the many historical accounts regarding the adversarial relationship between merchants and outport fishermen. Lewis Dawe, a prominent fish merchant and owner of Avalon Coal (Salt and Oil), recognized that Russell was capable of rising through the ranks when he worked on Dawe's ship the *National IV*. Although Dawe died, his wife took over the business, and this confirms that women were ship owners and business proprietors in the early 1900s.[131] She ensured that Russell received the proper education and training to become a Master, in accordance with her husband's wishes. She made arrangements for Russell to study navigation at the home of Mr. Lionel Parrott,[132] but Russell makes a puzzling statement that while Parrott had a navigation diploma, he did not have seagoing experience – which seems extraordinary for that time.

This reveals a dichotomy where I least expected to find one: the navigation instructor demonstrated literacy skills in acquiring his diploma and instructing future navigators but did not have the corresponding functional knowledge gained onboard a vessel. It seems somewhat contradictory that his students had to have instruction in both to obtain their navigator designation, while he may have purposefully avoided the sea. When Parrott considered Russell to be competent, he went to study under Captain

[130] Fred Rowe, *The History of Education in Newfoundland*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 24.
[131] Calvin D. Evans, *Silk Sails: Women of Newfoundland and their Ships*. (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2008) contains extensive information on female shipowners.
[132] Russell, *The Role of Sea Captain in the Life of Billy Russell*, Transcript page 29.

Blackmore in St. John's for two months and then learned Morse code and flags from Captain Stampten at the Board of Trade Building. Russell's account presents a transition into a discussion of Navigation Schools in the colony.

A recognized and renowned navigation instructor, Newfoundlander F.J. Doyle was born in 1844. During the winter months of the 1860s, he had up to twenty-five students taking his course, many of those masters and officers of Canadian vessels employed in the general trade of the Colony. The Newfoundland parliament enacted a law for the granting of Certificates of Competency to Masters and Mates in 1875 and issued its first certificates in 1877.[133] Until then, Newfoundlanders wishing to pass the exams had to take them at Canadian or English ports. Anyone who had served before the enactment of the "Masters and Mates Act" received Certificates of Service, and Mr. Doyle eventually issued more than 200 Certificates of Service and 350 Certificates of Competency. Of the 1,200 or so students he taught, many went on to occupy prominent positions on sailing vessels and steamships out of Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.[134] Educators continued to promote navigation skills for Newfoundland seafarers well into the next century.

A letter to the editor of *TheNewfoundland Quarterly* in April 1930 refers to a fierce storm in which Newfoundland seafarers excelled at handling ships, but emphasized that their abilities should be supplemented with navigation knowledge: "Navigation is purely a mechanical method for locating positions at sea, on land or in the air. It could be

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[133] "Shipmasters/Sail & Steam," *MTLC* Website. (accessed February 15, 2018 at https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/articles/shipmasters/sail-steam.php).

[134] Evans, John J. "Principal in the Making of Masters and Mates for our Mercantile Marine Service." *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, April 1913 Vol 12(4), 22. (Accessed November 22, 2017 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/quarterly/id/26043.)

easily taught to the boys at School in conjunction with their instruction in arithmetic. It would be a good subject for the Seamans [sic] Institute to place in its free instruction courses."[135] In response to this letter, J.L. Paton wrote that Memorial College offered Navigation courses since its inception in 1925. Paton was appointed the first President of the College and came from England as an educational reformer and dedicated advocate for accessible education for all members of society.[136]

Paton replied that Prof. A. G. Hatcher offered a summer school course on the Theory of Navigation for teachers. Upon passing the examination, teachers would be qualified to teach theory to Navigators. This complemented the practical experience seafarers acquired at work that was also necessary to obtain their ticket. Paton added that several courses had been held in the outports, thereby offering essential access to seafarers in remote communities. In this one instance, some outport residents were given equal access to essential formal education. Secondly, during the winter semester Captains Whelan and Hounsell taught navigation to seafarers in the Library Room of the Morris Building to prepare them for exams for a Certificate in either "Coastwise traffic or for Ocean-going ships."[137] A.G. Hatcher continued teaching Navigation for many years and

[135] Arthur Selwyn-Brown, "Newfoundland Schooners and Atlantic Storms: A study in romantic adventures and a lesson," *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. 29(4), (April 1930), 39. (Accessed September 8, 2018 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/quarterly/id/30249.)
[136] James Overton, "Moral Education of the Poor: Adult Education and Land Settlement Schemes in Newfoundland in the 1930s," *Newfoundland Studies* Vol. 11(2) (1995), Special Topic Issue, Education and Society, 257.
[137] J. L. Paton, "Navigation Classes for Seafaring Men," (Letter to the Editor) *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. 29(4), (April 1930), 39. (Accessed September 8, 2018 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/quarterly/id/30267/rec/1.)

penned an article on the history of Navigational instruction in the colony for *The Newfoundland Quarterly* in 1944.[138]

While Masters and Mates were encouraged to become educated in navigation and they eventually had to obtain Certificates of Competency, the majority of Newfoundland seafarers learned from the more seasoned seafarers the skills and techniques required to survive at sea. In their oral accounts, the captains provide evidence that many males spent at least part of the year working in the family fishery after age ten or so. Russell recalls that he signed on as a young sailor, a couple of his long-time skippers taught him a large amount, and he "gradually worked his way up."[139] By age twenty, most males had 'graduated' to operating their own schooner or working as a full-time seafarer for others.

3.7) Seafarers' Practical Experience

Many Newfoundland males pursued careers at sea where they were exposed to new words and expected to understand them to execute commands instantaneously. Rapid comprehension was not only a workplace requirement, on the ocean under any conditions it could quickly become a matter of survival for the entire crew. For the majority, knowledge would have been acquired through observation and the guidance of more seasoned crew members. For example, *The Sailor's Alphabet* is a variant of a traditional sea shanty. It illustrates sailor's use of rhyme to memorize the various ship components and their functions for ready reference.

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[138] See A.G. Hatcher, R.C.N, M.A, L.L.D, "The Teaching of Navigation," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* Vol. 44(3) (December 1944), 26-28. (Accessed November 22, 2017 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/quarterly/id/32403.)

[139] Russell, *The Role of Sea Captain in the Life of Billy Russell*, Transcript page 29.

The Sailor's Alphabet[140]

A for the anchor which hangs on our bow,
B for the bow-sprits through the wild seas do plow;
C for the capstan we turn 'round and 'round, and
D the davits we lower our boats down.

So merry, so merry, so merry are we,
No mortals on earth are like sailors at sea;
Blow high or blow low as the good ship sails on,
Give the sailor his grog and there's nothing goes wrong.

E for the ensign which flies from our peak,
F for the fo'c'sle where the sailors do sleep;
G for the galley where the cook moves around,
H for the halyards we move up and down. (*Chorus)*

I for the iron on our good ship's main boom,
J for the jib which moves her along;
K for the keelson, the keel is below,
L for the lanyards we move to and fro. (*Chorus)*

M for the mainmast so stout and so strong,
N for the needle which never points wrong;
O for the oars we row our boats out
P for the pumps which keep her afloat. (*Chorus)*

Q for the quarter-deck, where the officers move around,
R for the rigging we run up and down;
S for the sailors which move her along,
T for the topsails we pull up and down. (*Chorus)*

U for the Union which flies from our peak,
V for the vittles which the sailors do eat;
W for the wheel where we all take our turn,
X, Y, and **Z** is the name on our stern. (*Chorus)*

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[140] Author unknown. Arrangement by Stan Hugill. Collected in 1958 from Mrs Gladys Snow of Cormack, Newfoundland, by Kenneth Peacock and published in *Songs Of The Newfoundland Outports*, Vol 3, pp.885-886, by The National Museum Of Canada (1965) Crown Copyrights Reserved. From: http://gestsongs.com/01/sailor.htm.

Once their ship left the shore behind, seafarers could only rely on their abilities and each other. Foley reminisces about his initial voyages, providing information on the factors involved in becoming a proper seaman. He emphasized his early familiarity with schooners and his knowledge of steering, climbing and using a compass.[141] However, Foley also provides evidence that there was no initial barrier to men becoming seafarers. On a trip aboard the *Clutha* to Gibraltar there were two others without experience, and also a stowaway he named as Collins – "sometimes stowing away was the best way to get experience."[142] According to Foley stowaways often went on to become mates and captains, but he does not elaborate further. Perhaps it was due to their determination to pursue a seafaring career at any cost, even through illegal methods. Foley served as Mate under Captain Charlie "C.P." Moore[143] on the *Clutha* O.N. 79429 for a voyage terminating July 23, 1920 that travelled to Gibraltar, Genoa and Barbados.

Older men rarely took up seafaring afresh and Foley provides his rationalization: "Paddy Tobin was forty – old for a first voyage and had a hard time trying to learn – he was too old to learn. Al Tucker was in his early twenties and could learn quick so he was fine."[144] Fifty-year-old Patrick Tobin of Placentia signed aboard the *Dazzle* in 1921, although his signature is quite shaky and barely legible. This is the only entry that might provide a clue for the "Paddy" to whom Foley refers. Albert Tucker of St. John's appears in several Agreements, progressing from seaman to bosun, but there is no conclusive evidence that this is the same man that Foley mentions. It is noteworthy that an 'x'

[141] Foley, SIDE A, timestamp 62.
[142] Foley, SIDE A, timestamp 67.
[143] For information on Captain Moore's sailing career see Frank Saunders' *Sailing Vessels and Crews of Carbonear*, (St. John's: Robinson Blackmore Printing, 1981), 104-108; and the *Clutha* on page 89.
[144] Foley, SIDE A, timestamp 70.

denotes the younger Tucker was unable to sign his name, while the older Tobin did provide a signature, albeit a rather unsteady one.

The crew of the *Clutha* had an eventful voyage, and the Agreement would not reveal much of this. In his account, Foley says he shared the steering with Tucker in four-hour watches, and they were relieved by the Mate every thirty minutes or so to man the pump because the ship leaked severely. They also had to climb one hundred feet to take in and tie off the gaff topsail, which required three trips up different poles. Unsurprisingly he "was a real monkey before the voyage was over."[145] Seafarers aboard sailing vessels also became good at observation, out of necessity, experienced in the physical workings of the sails masts and yards, and developed an ability to judge the character of their shipmates through close contact. Much of their knowledge came from interactions with shipmates, often communicated during off-hours through 'yarning'.

For seafarers, spinning yarns is held to be almost as natural as breathing, but yarns themselves are not so simple. "All the sailors got a story, some are true some are false,"[146] according to singer-songwriter Ron Hynes. Yarns are more than entertainment; they are a person's oral expression of their experiences and how these experiences have been assimilated into their own identity. This leads to questions of the meaning of storytelling, how purposive seafarers found it to be. Yarning provided entertainment, but it was also designed to educate new crew members while accentuating the distinctiveness of maritime labour. Canadian historian Eric Sager suggests that yarns have deeper meanings than simply the event; for seafarers they are "rooted in shared experiences of work,

[145] Foley, SIDE A, timestamp 82.
[146] Ron Hynes, *St. John's Waltz*, (accessed December 10, 2017 at https://www.elyrics.net/read/r/ron-hynes-lyrics/st.-john_s-waltz-lyrics.html,)

struggle, adventure, fear and hardship, and present seafarers' images of themselves."[147] Yarns are one way that workers become acquainted and judge the skill levels of each other. In this way, yarns could be beneficial in establishing and cementing relationships and cultivate trust among crew members. This is quite a different set of relations than these seafarers experienced in a formal classroom, but some of those school mates would eventually become shipmates. They might navigate through Bourdieu's fields in the classroom and community, aboard ship and in foreign ports together. These fields were not necessarily discrete for Newfoundland seafarers as they interacted and accumulated social capital throughout their careers.

3.8) "Master Under God" – Master Mariners

Functional knowledge likely remained more important than classroom education for the majority of seafarers and was more than adequate to hold a seaman's berth, though not to progress to master. Seafarers depended on the master to guide them safely. He stood at the top of the hierarchical maritime workplace – "Master under God" according to charter parties and insurance policies.[148] Insurance and official inspection requirements remind us that shipping operated in a regulated, institutional context, one based on the reading and writing of reports. The Merchant Shipping Act ensured that masters were accountable to officials for observing legislation, and the Board of Trade kept records of their service and assessments. As part of the job requirements, masters had to

[147] Eric W. Sager, *Ships and Memories. Merchant Seafarers in Canada's Age of Steam.* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), "Yarns", 16.
[148] Allan Villier, *The Way of a Ship; being some account of the ultimate development of the ocean-going square-rigged sailing vessel, and in the manner of her handling, her voyage-making, her personnel, her economics, her performance, and her end,* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 191.

communicate with a variety of people, from ship owners and shipping agents to port authorities, so superior literacy and numeracy skills were essential.

What were the fundamental qualifications to become a master? "To operate a sailing ship was to master a 'craft.' … The craft connotes more than a clutch of skills; it is a code for how to live. It turns a sailing ship into a fellowship, a community forged by shared values."[149] Joseph Conrad might reach heights of eloquence in what he wrote in answer to the question, but the oral history respondents reveal their understanding of what it took to be a master. First and foremost were the skills of a sailor, and those not only confined to handling his own vessel. A master mariner acquired knowledge of the handling properties of different craft in practice and in the spoken dialect of an outport work culture.

Russell provided details on the duties of the typical Newfoundland Captain. In general, he navigated with a chart, loran, compass, towlog and a deep-sea lead.[150] Ice was a big problem off the east coast of Newfoundland, and masters or mates would slow the ship according to visibility and listen for bergs and growlers (smaller icebergs). In dense fog, Russell's captain read his log every two to four hours, took a reading, "reckoned with what the log was showing,"[151] and recorded this around the clock. This casual comment about the importance of keeping detailed written records for legal purposes reminds the listener of the many omnipresent dangers lurking in the maritime workplace. Foley related that Captain Charlie Moore's job entailed keeping an account of longitude,

[149] Maya Jasanoff, "At Sea with Joseph Conrad. Learning about Life, From the Age of the Great Sailing Ships," *New York Times*, (August 7, 2015). (accessed September 20, 2017 at https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/opinion/sunday/at-sea-with-joseph-conrad.html).
[150] A loran was a long-distance navigation system using radio signals from two ground stations to determine position. A towlog was a large log towed behind a boat and used to determine speed.
[151] Russell, Transcript page 28.

latitude and dead reckoning,[152] but these were also skills to be passed on. From him, Foley learned navigation – how to "take the sun and use a sextant."[153] As Foley and Russell discuss their former Captains' navigation skills, the listener appreciates that an element of formal instruction distinguished ship's officers from general seamen. They also provide evidence that seafarers acquired functional knowledge from the more experienced officers.

Masters ultimately were responsible for balancing the requirements of speed, necessary to complete voyages quickly and discharge cargoes, with the obligation of safety for the crew and cargo. The *More Than a List of the Crew* website provides a list of additional skills required of a master.

> Masters had to be well versed in the rigging, in management of the ship and handling the ship's boats; he [the master] would be familiar with the rules of shipping lanes, signaling, and how to moor the ship; he would know how to take care of the ventilation of the cargo, how to stow explosives and grains, and be able to deal with accidents. In addition, the master was expected to know how to: construct jury, or replacement, rudders for metal and wooden ships; manage food provisions in the case of a wreck; manage the ship in heavy weather; rescue the crew of a disabled vessel; deal with a ship when on its beam ends (listing 45° or more), unmanageable, disabled, or grounded on shore; place a ship in dry dock and direct repairs, or put into port in distress with damage to ship and cargo. [154]

For all vessels falling under Board of Trade regulations the master also discharged and paid crew members upon arrival in port, and often had to recruit new staff. No wonder

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[152] For a detailed description of this and other early navigational terms see https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/navigation-methods.php.
[153] Foley, SIDE A, Timestamp 144.
[154] Valerie Burton, "So Your Ancestor was a Merchant Shipmaster," *More Than a List of the Crew*, (St. John's: Maritime History Archive, 2011). (accessed November 4, 2017 at https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/articles/shipmasters).

that masters were recognized as "next after God" when at sea (and held accountable for the loss of life or property) although once on land they were accountable to shipowners, merchants and government officials.[155]

Newfoundland masters were educated practically from birth in the functional skills necessary to become a seafarer. They skillfully guided their vessels in dense fog, vast ice fields, freezing temperatures and sudden gales, and it was these navigation skills as distinct from seamanship that elevated them above accomplished seafarers.[156] Masters may have been promoted based on their superior navigation skills but communication and computation skills were essential to maintain that designation. In Newfoundland, many of the smaller vessels were owned by the masters, so there was no division of capital and labour. With the dual roles of employee and employer, the master was rewarded with wages but also with power and status. In coastal vessels such as the *Kromhout* where crew members knew each other and were often related, there was still a hierarchy. For the shorter voyages and local crews "the fraternal informality of outport communities might survive alongside the hierarchy of work"[157] As well, these men might realize that they too could follow a similar path to success and prestige as their captains, who rose from the lower ranks through hard work, learning the ropes and obeying orders.

[155] See R.S. Craig, "Printed Guides for Master Mariners as a Source of Productivity in Shipping 1750-1914," *Journal of Transport History* Vol. 3(2) (September 1982), 23-35. The article discusses the growth in the shipping industry during a period of rapid technological and commercial change, the many types of new knowledge Masters required, and the methods by which it was disseminated.
[156] See John W. Froude, *On the High Seas: The Diary of Captain John W. Froude, Twillingate – 1863-1939*, (St. John's: Jesperson, 1983). His diary is written in rhyme, and contains an interesting mix of practical information, such as navigation rules and shipboard procedures, along with songs, proverbs and weather rhymes.
[157] Sager, *Ships and Memories*, 86.

3.9) Searching for Women in Men's Oral Accounts

Gender breaks the surface of a Newfoundland historiography in the 1970s, for the most part in the work of folklorists and sociologists, but becomes extensive in the 1990s. In 1993, sociologist Marilyn Porter determined that most of the existing work on Newfoundland societies concentrated exclusively on men and male perspectives while women and their contributions were commensurately invisible.[158] Porter employed oral history to explore household economic strategies and patriarchy, asserting that a rigid sexual division of labour does not necessarily imply male dominance. As shore skippers of the inshore fishery, women hired and supervised employees, worked 'on the flakes' and performed all household work.[159] Men worked to provide for their families, but women produced and raised those families while also working inside and outside of the house. With men frequently absent at sea, women regularly acted autonomously.

In 2008, Willeen Keough produced *The Slender Thread. Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750-1860* from her Memorial University doctoral thesis. Investigating power relationships through ethnicity, she theorizes that 'plebeian' Irish Catholic women in this area enjoyed remarkable personal and collective agency.[160] Women were essential, skilled workers who took pride in their numerous, crucial and highly valued efforts that the community readily acknowledged. Finding evidence that work was delegated more on availability and experience than on gendered notions of ability or strength, she speculates that these Irish women were unexpectedly free from traditional forms of patriarchy.

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[158] Marilyn Porter, *Place and Persistence in the Lives of Newfoundland Women*, (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1993), 5.
[159] Marilyn Porter, "'She Was Skipper of the Shore': Crew. Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland," *Labour /Le Travail*, Vol.15 (1985),116.
[160] Willeen Keough, *The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750-1860*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

Therefore they were a fundamental element in family formation, permanent settlement and socio-economic stability on the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland.

More recently, Scottish historian Lynn Abrams explores the spheres of seafaring males and onshore females in "There Is Many a Thing That Can Be Done with Money." While she studied the Shetland Islands, her exploration of a fishing community in the nineteenth and twentieth century reveals many similarities to Newfoundland in the same period. Challenging the existing historiography on traditional roles of women, she says that Scottish islander women carved roles for themselves in both private and public domains. Women had a degree of economic and cultural power due to males' lengthy absences and a high emigration rate. "This power rested on women's skills and endurance as domestic producers, their active role in the market as traders of goods, and their place in the community as possessors of certain kinds of knowledge or cultural capital."[161] Her use of this term reflects Bourdieu's impact on how we now view 'human capitals' in terms of their value or cost to people, organizations or states. Although women in her study produced and traded hosiery, they operated in a barter-truck system which facilitated women's complex networks in exchanging goods and services. Women formed strong bonds through their economic and social relationships, and possessed household authority through their management and income contributions.

Many seafarers' wives did not see their husbands for long periods. Foley recalls his first trip overseas on the three-masted *Nellie M*, departing in December 1915 with five thousand quintals of unpacked bulk Labrador fish bound for Greece. Like the crew in

[161] Lynn Abrams, "'There Is Many a Thing That Can Be Done with Money': Women, Barter, and Autonomy in a Scottish Fishing Community in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Signs* Vol. 37(3) (Spring 2012), 602.

Barrett's Privateers[162] the boat leaked so badly that they were "pumping like madmen all the way." They spent fifty days in Gibraltar due to German subs patrolling the Mediterranean and the Greece blockade. Then they were ordered to go to Alicante in Spain, a five to eight day trip. The crew spent several days in port and then sailed to Genoa, Italy which took another ten days and they remained there for a month. They unloaded fish and loaded casks to take to Málaga, and then continued to Cádiz to load salt[163] which was used in Newfoundland to cure fish. They left Cádiz and had good weather for the month-long return trip to Cape Race, but then spent ten days in Trepassey bay due to strong winds and bad weather. The winds finally shifted to the southwest and they sailed into St. John's in August after eight months away.[164]

The selection of oral interviews for this study concentrates on men, so the point is how, where and when is there a reference to women's activities in men's testimonies? Russell states he was away a total of thirty years during their fifty years of marriage, usually three to five months at a time.[165] When men were at sea, wives had to handle tasks normally allocated to men, as well as make financial decisions and act as moral guides and disciplinarians to children. They also worked and harvested the vegetable plot, cared for domestic animals, sewed clothing and hooked household mats, and often provisioned the family's "winter supply of flour, margarine, sugar, molasses, beef and pork"[166] with money earned picking berries. Blackwood notes that the women of Safe

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[162] "Barrett's Privateers." Lyrics at https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/alestorm/barrettsprivateers.html.
[163] "Cádiz salt for sale" *Harbour Grace Standard*, August 12, 1904, 1. (accessed November 20, 2017 at http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/hgstandard/HarborGraceStandard19040812.pdf.
[164] Excerpts from*:* Jack Foley, *Recording of Fergus Foley Talking About His Life at Sea.* MUNFLA F7639c/C7609. Accession #85-123.1 Audio Cassette. 1985. (Recorded June 22, 1974).
[165] Russell, *The Role of Sea Captain in the Life of Billy Russell.* Transcript page 28.
[166] Porter, "She Was Skipper of the Shore Crew", 116.

Harbour raised sheep for wool and meat, pigs for meat, goats for milk and chickens for eggs – to feed their own family and to sell for income.[167] During the First World War, women were at least as active as men in war-related community events. They maintained their homes, visited families of enlistees, knitted socks for the soldiers[168] and served on committees raising funds and other essential goods. What emerges from the oral histories is that the four respondents acknowledge that, along with having prime responsibility for feeding, cleaning and caring for all family members and animals, the women in their lives also assumed countless other duties.

There are numerous writers now contributing directly and indirectly to our understanding of the social fabric of outport Newfoundland, foregrounding women's considerable contributions and changing position in the relations of power. Their work embodies an intersectional approach that takes into account the historical, social and political context while concurrently recognizing the differentiated experiences of individuals. Crucially, each of the cited authors furthers the argument for women's agency in Newfoundland's maritime society as well as strengthening the claim for the value of local and experiential knowledge.

[167] Blackwood, *The Lives of Captain and Mrs. Albert Blackwood in Safe Harbour.* Transcript page 16.
[168] "Notre Dame Workers for Empire." *The Twillingate Sun* (August 29, 1914), 2. (accessed October 13, 2017 at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mha_twill/id/1409/rec/1).

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS

The personal testimonies recorded in the MUNFLA oral histories portray seafaring life in the early 1900s. In their interviews, not one of the seafarers provides reasons for initially going to sea. Foley, Hickey, Blackwood and Russell all discuss entering the maritime labour force as a natural progression approaching adulthood, following in their father's (or uncle's) footsteps and apprenticing with family members. There is no discussion of being compelled to contribute to the family economy (although Blackwood shows an awareness of his contribution). There is no explicit discussion of it being a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, nor is it seen as an act of independence. Lane sheds light on this absence in the record. He suggests that "People born into the seafaring communities were almost 'predestined' to be what they became, regardless of their talents and potentialities. Once aboard ship the horizons of expectations and knowledge of chances might expand."[169]

Although these seafarers may have initially had minimal or no literacy skills, their work prospects improved once they were employed on a merchant vessel. It was then up to each individual how much they learned and how fast they acquired functional knowledge. Each of the interviewees advanced from the forecastle to become a master mariner. When asked would they do it again, each seafarer emphatically stated yes. Russell continued with "If I could do it all over, I'd do it freely. What I know now, especially nowadays, there is a lot I'd have to learn, with the new equipment and electronics. I know I'm not highly educated, but I got a good bit of learning for my day. I

[169] Lane, *Grey Dawn Breaking*, 38.

still miss it but now I'm more used to home."[170] These master mariners did not have extensive schooling in their youth, but all recognize that the functional knowledge they acquired aboard ship was in essence the education that elevated them in their careers. Although very proud of their careers and accomplishments, and obviously disposed to talk about their adventures, their stories focus on apprenticing and learning the ropes from other masters.

These four men continued at sea for the majority of their working lives, spending a large percentage of their life away from family and the community. While their accounts are distinctive to Newfoundland, they cross national boundaries and demonstrate the global nature of seafaring. Newfoundland merchant seafarers regularly voyaged to Europe, the Caribbean and South America, and as such were exposed to new cultures and new customs. Seafaring was central to their lives. Stories about work are paramount in the narrative of their life story contained in the MUNFLA recordings. The quantity and quality of information in these four oral histories goes a long way to facilitate exploration of the interactions of family, education and functional knowledge acquired through work.

What can be asked of oral sources and gleaned from the Agreements respectively will always present some incommensurability. Returning to the latter and summarizing findings in light of this chapter's observations will advance my arguments to their conclusion. The Agreements reveal a great deal about Newfoundland seafarers' literacy rates. Before 1900, less than 40% of seafarers in the sampled Agreements were able to sign aboard a vessel, but the numbers increased significantly in the twentieth century.

[170] Russell, *The Role of Sea Captain in the Life of Billy Russell,* Transcript page 34.

Unexpectedly, rural seafarers had considerably higher signature rates than those from the capital city. Further investigation for sectarian or differential education provision would prove useful. My discovery of female seafarers working as stewardesses was noteworthy, although it was difficult to find them with the existing search parameters in the *Newfoundland and Labrador Crew Lists Database*. These women ranged in age from very young to senior citizens. Their high signature rates reveal them to be more literate, even in proportion to Newfoundland's female population.

There is little evidence that Newfoundland-born officers were drawn from a substantially different social class, yet they were highly literate: only eight of a total 379 officers signed aboard with an 'x' during this seventy- year span. Their exceptionally high signature rates lend credence to the argument that Newfoundlanders acquired education at a level necessary to function in their society, and attained further reading and writing skills when necessary – when faced with a Board of Trade Examination, for example. Some were self-taught, becoming reacquainted with their school-day texts; others looked to family or friends for instruction; and some even learned while at sea pursuing a career. Seafarer's literacy acquisition entwined both formal school education and the informal sharing of experiential knowledge by family and other outport community residents – male and female. Additionally, seafarers looking to advance through the ranks may have acquired knowledge by attending a navigation school[171] between voyages.

The three seafarers who signed aboard the *Madeleine Constance* in 1919 receive renewed attention here because their signatures illustrated the range of seafarers' writing

[171] For an example of a Newfoundland instructor see "Principal in the making of masters and mates for our mercantile marine service," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* Vol. 12(4), (April 1913), 22.

capacities. This is the only record for Paddy [?] Carey of Witless Bay in the Newfoundland Agreement collection and we cannot follow him further. A supplementary notation reveals that the oldest seafarer, John French of Carbonear, "failed to join" this voyage as Steward/Cook but later that year made his mark again on the *Esther Hankinson* for a multi-leg voyage to Gibraltar, Cadiz and Seville. Then he disappeared from the Agreements. It seems likely that the master signed for young 'Fred' Coward of St. John's. Yet, by age seventeen he had risen through the ranks to Assistant Engineer and provided a clearly legible signature. In short, he acquired writing skills while pursuing a seafaring career alongside his older relative, thus providing yet another clue to the diverse methods of acquiring literacy.

Seafarers from particular communities appear together in multiple Newfoundland Agreements, which can be taken to indicate that ties of paternalism and kinship were not restricted to their onshore lives. The Agreements provide graphic proof in the thousands of other signatures of specific crews where the majority originate from the same outport town, and often also share a family name. Seafarers and their families had to reconcile themselves to prolonged absences, and most maintained relationships through letters and newspapers which suggest that this group, or someone in the crew on their behalf, exercised literacy skills. On the other hand, while they were at sea the ties of paternalism and kinship were not elided.[172]

[172] Sara Flaherty, *The Family Lives of Seafarers in the Early Modern Period*, B.A. Honours Dissertation, (St. John's: Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, May 1999), 7.

I approached the Agreements and how they reflect on seafaring life and work with a different awareness than Alexander. As a practitioner of neo-classical economics, like the other ACSP members, he was enamoured with the newness of computers and their ability to perform complex analyses and he embraced the new methodology. However, the execution of analysis in his article became somewhat disjointed as he added more factors in his pursuit of statistical clarification. I emulate him in quantifying Newfoundland seafarers' signature rates contained in the Agreements to determine what levels of writing skills Newfoundland seafarers possessed. Significantly, his tentative examination of Newfoundland seafarers' signature provision suggested low literacy rates, and my more considered investigation of the Agreements confirms it.

But I take my study of Newfoundland seafarer's literacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century much further than "simply counting." I began by taking into account Newfoundland's colonial status and marginalization in an increasingly industrialized North Atlantic. Education, employment and cultural transmission exist in an historically complex relationship, and my archival-rich study considers reading and writing skills in concert with functional knowledge and work skills. Clarifying the state of the educational system in the colony has revealed that, although the elite endeavoured to provide the colony's residents with literacy skills, results were poor because of the nature of the family fishery. Reading and writing skills were not achieved in a linear progression. Nor was literacy necessarily a permanent acquisition because these skills must be utilized for a person to retain them.

By expanding my research to reintegrate household and community relations into the lives of "working men who got wet" I offer an improved understanding of the role of social capital in the transformation of Newfoundland. My main objective for moving the study into homes, families and communities meant adopting more discursive methods of analysis in respect of the sources — the personal accounts and newspapers — that enable this changed vision. The information in these sources confirms the enduring robust oral tradition in Newfoundland. Alongside sporadic schooling, children learned through the informal sharing of experiential knowledge by their family members and other outport community residents. They watched how certain tasks were performed, and then became competent by practicing under the watchful eyes of the local experts. Children began fishing while very young, and learned the intricacies of life at sea from older residents. For most of those who moved from the inshore fishery to the merchant marine, literacy was not a requirement aboard ship. Functional knowledge gained in childhood and aboard ship on their voyages was sufficient for the majority of seafarers to earn a living.

A generation after Alexander's premature death, modified methods of historical research and discourse permit a more nuanced analysis of the dynamics of literacy, functional knowledge and social capital. Historical study is dynamic, pursued from the present as new records become available, methodologies evolve, viewpoints change and political structures are modified. Since Alexander's time, disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, archaeology, geography, economics, religious studies and others have contributed to our perceptions of early Newfoundland society. These fields support the changing approaches to studying literacy and education, and reveal the shifting reasons elites advocated mass literacy movements.

In the nineteenth century, motives ranged from democratization to religious indoctrination. By the 1970s functional literacy was viewed as a skill necessary for economic development and to enhance quality of life. [173] In the 1980s and 1990s the focus shifted to social practices of literacy and understanding context. Literacy was no longer viewed in isolation, and influential educators like Paulo Freire emphasized a pedagogy that considered specific socio-cultural relationships.[174] This movement refocused literacy studies, with a concern for the relationship between knowledge and power for the antecedents of their relations in the present.

Today, social commentators claim that high levels of literacy are essential to function in twenty-first century "knowledge economies,"[175] to benefit from technological advances. Students should master the '4Cs' – creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.[176] Recently, a 2016 UNESCO report declared that "[l]iteracy for all is at the heart of basic education for all, and creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality, and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy."[177] Literacy has supported many discussions in the past that conceive of a progressive broadening of the "3Rs" since the early 1800s. By

[173] William H. Sewell, Jr., "A Strange Career: The Historical Study of Economic Life," *History and Theory* Vol. 49(4) (December 2010), 155.
[174] See Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, (Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985) and numerous other works on education and literacy.
[175] Alison F. Garton and Chris Pratt, "Cultural and Developmental Disposition to Literacy," in David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 515.
[176] See http://web.tech4learning.com/blog-0/bid/45149/the-21st-century-classroom-where-the-3-r-s-meet-the-4-c-s .
[177] A. M. Chartier, "The Teaching of Literacy Skills in Western Europe. An Historical Perspective," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, 465 footnote 10 – "Education for all Global Monitoring Report."

reconceptualising illiteracy in this thesis, I have highlighted Newfoundland's enduring oral culture and the value of local knowledge in resolving problems underpinning the social and economic inequality in our maritime society.

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