

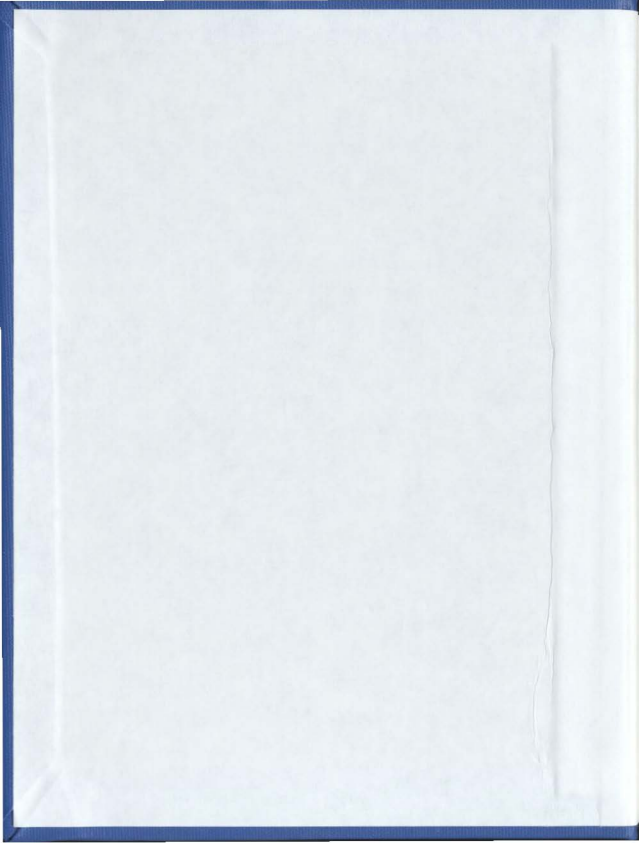
MAKING FISH: SALT-COD PROCESSING ON THE
EAST COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND -
A STUDY IN HISTORIC OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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MARK ELIOT FERGUSON



**MAKING FISH: SALT-COD PROCESSING ON THE
EAST COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND --
A STUDY IN HISTORIC
OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE**

BY

© MARK ELIOT FERGUSON

**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**Department of Folklore
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

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Abstract

I investigate the occupational folklife of making salt fish on the east coast of Newfoundland in the light-salted fishery from 1920 to 1950. This processing was central to most Newfoundlanders' lives and has been neglected by scholars. Fundamental to my approach are insider (emic) perceptions and perspectives of fishing people.

Occupational folklife posits that work and talk about work are key to people's understandings of themselves and their worlds. Several themes emerged from people's talk about fish processing. I undertake a micro-analysis of the making of one variety of salt fish (pickled) to demonstrate that producing this valuable commodity was complex, labour-intensive work requiring skilled techniques and traditional knowledge. Women played a vital role in the work: their role and the significance of the work to their identities are explored. Women and men derived various rewards from these often communal labours: social status, community bonds, and the satisfactions gained from skilled productivity.

The hectic work of the summer fishery was but one element of a multifaceted seasonal round. I examine fish-processing's dominant role in that round, highlighting important memories and understandings of its positive and negative attributes.

The salt fisheries had many branches and products. The key distinctions that differentiated these are investigated, establishing the centrality of the inshore light-salted branches to the economy and culture of the Dominion of Newfoundland. Given their importance, the material rewards accruing to fisheries

workers were meagre and, at times, living standards fell below subsistence. The overall quality of life suffered badly, especially in times of economic depression. These harsh realities resulted in part from the effects of the system and practices of mercantile capitalism. The intricacies of the cull and truck were two strategies by which fishing people's gains were minimized and merchants' maximized. This system played a major role in the decline of the industry through the first half of this century.

Through these analyses, I come to terms with two contradictory views of the salt fishery as described to me -- one dystopian and negative, the other utopian and seemingly nostalgic. I challenge the validity of the conventional dystopian depictions of the industry, the communities, and the people who did the work.

Acknowledgements

Theses are nearly always collaborations, the work of more than one person in so many ways. This one is no exception. I have a great many people to acknowledge and to thank. First I would like to thank my partner, Brenda O'Brien, for her unstinting and endless support, her encouragement, ideas, suggestions and criticisms, her role as chief editor, and her love. Without these things this study would have been greatly diminished. She has also patiently put up with the long and trying writing of this work. I cannot thank her enough.

Dr. Gerald Pocius, my supervisor, has been entirely supportive of my work and research at every step throughout this process. He has continually and willingly shared his time and insights with me (and with many others). He has included me in a number of his field projects and provided research positions. His friendship and faith in me have been invaluable in bringing this research to fruition.

Next, and equally important, are the many fishing women and men with whom I have worked in many communities on this Island over the last four years. Their contributions to this thesis know no bounds. Without their help it would not exist. People's generosity and willingness to share their knowledge and expertise, and their hospitality were all seemingly infinite. Their patience was too. Their kindness and help will never be forgotten. I consider all of them to be my friends and I thank them here. On Fogo Island William and Lottie Brett, Len Brown, John and Jane Coffin, Victor Downton, Reginald Eveleigh, Dan Greene, Joyce and Flo Primmer, Doug and Lucy Primmer.

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In Little Catalina George Penney. In Gooseberry Cove Fink Seaward.

In New Chelsea Robert Trimm. In Sibleys Cove-Brownsdale, Louise and Clarence Sparks, Linda and Bennett March. In Port de Grave Clayton Ralph.

In Maddox Cove-Petty Harbour Mary Ann Martin and Bernard Martin. In Bay Bulls John Deagen and Bill Joy. In Witless Bay Cornelius O'Brien.

In Southeast Bight Pius and Mary Ellen Power, and Margaret Power. In Grand Bank Gerald Crews, Arch Evans, Roy Grandy, Stan and Janet Handrigan, Leo and Olive Pope, Randell Pope, Frank Riggs, Martha and Captain Bob Smith. In Fortune Mac Piercey.

To those I have inadvertently left out, my sincerest apologies.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the curators and staff at the Newfoundland Museum for their support of much of the research for this thesis and their permission to use it in this thesis. In this regard, special thanks to Walter Peddle, Curator of History. Without his inspiration, encouragement and efforts to secure permission to use the materials that we collected during my year of work at the Museum, this thesis would have foundered.

Brenda O'Brien led what was literally a team of fine editors who helped me

get the final draft of this thesis whipped into shape. Brenda did the major editing of this manuscript and did a remarkable job. I also owe Susan O'Brien many thanks for her heroic, painstaking editing and proof-reading of large sections of this manuscript, and for her artistic and computer work on the maps found in it. Likewise, Camille Fouillard and Bruce Mason did double and triple duty in the editing department. Bruce also helped in many other respects, particularly with the table in chapter five. My editing team also included Christina Barr, Eileen Condon, Bruce Gilbert, and Dale Jarvis. They too did wonderful jobs. Every one of these people have been absolutely superb to me (and to this project) -- again I cannot thank them enough.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Approaches	8
2. Fieldwork: Methods and Contexts	41
2.1 In the Field: Methods and Issues	43
2.2 Fish-Making Contexts: Bonavista Fishing Rooms	56
3. Cleaning and Salting	70
3.1 Landing Fish	75
3.2 Cleaning and Splitting Fish	84
3.3 Salting	106
4. Washing and Drying	124
4.1 Fish Makers: The Centrality of Women	128
4.2 Fish Making: Washing and Drying	136
4.3 Threats to Fish Making	161
4.4 The Perfect Pickled Fish	169
4.5 Conclusion	178
5. Variations on Making Fish	185
5.1 Variations of Technique and Product	191
5.2 The Classes of Salt Fish	196
5.3 Conclusion	217

6. The Economics of the Salt Fishery: Fisher Perspectives	
on Culling and Truck	220
6.1 Culling	228
6.2 Truck and Other Strategies	247
6.3 Conclusion	252
7. Conclusion: The Salt Fishery's Decline --	
Reconciling Dystopia and Nostalgia	258
Works Cited	282
Appendix I Interviews Conducted	294
Appendix II Transcription of John Downing's "The maner of catching and	
makeing drie fishe in Newland"	297

List of Tables

Table	Page
I Salting Estimates for Various Classes of Fish	204

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1.1: Round codfish on the floor of Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	2
1.2: Cleaned, split, salted, and drying codfish on a flake in New Bonaventure	3
1.3: Splitting stage, stage head, and salting stage (circa 1940s), Old Cove, Cape Bonavista	4
1.4: Stage and stage head, Tilting, Fogo Island	5
1.5: Mrs. Laura Whiffen at home, Bonavista	13
1.6: Mrs May and Mr. Wilson Hayward at home, Bonavista	14
1.7: Interior of Stanley Waterman's stage, Deep Bay, Fogo Island	18
1.8: The Moulands' flake, Mockbeggar, Bonavista	20
2.1: Map of communities in eastern Newfoundland	54
2.2: Wilson Hayward's Map of Fishing Room Locations in and around Bonavista	60
2.3: Map of Fishing Rooms at Red Cove Beach (circa 1940s)	63
2.4: Red Cove Beach, Bonavista, 1994	64
3.1: A "sea" coming into Mifflin's Cove, Cape Bonavista	77
3.2: Herb and Dan Whiffen's splitting stage, Old Cove, Cape Bonavista	80
3.3: Flake, stage and "T," Mifflin's Cove, Cape Bonavista	81

3.4: Bridge leading to Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	85
3.5: Door opening onto stage head of Leslie Coles's stage, Deep Bay, Fogo Island	88
3.6: Washing down the splitting table, Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	89
3.7: Heading fish, Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	92
3.8: Three salt fish displaying various flaws, New Bonaventure	95
3.9: Splitting fish, Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	98
3.10: Sound-bones and splitting knife, Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island	102
4.1: A faggot of fish on a flake in New Bonaventure	144
4.2: Big Lance Cove, near Bonavista (Trinity Bay side of Cape Bonavista)	146
4.3: Red Cove, looking north to Corner Cove and Durdle's Gulch	147
4.4: Levi Abbott's flake and store, Mockbeggar, Bonavista	149
4.5: Levi Abbott's store, flake ramp and flake, Mockbeggar, Bonavista	150
4.6: Posts and shores of Levi Abbott's flake	151
4.7: Waterhorse fish drying on end of flake nearest water, New Bonaventure	154
4.8: Damaged salt fish on flake in New Bonaventure	177
6.1: Fishermen waiting to have fish culled at J.T. Swyers Co., Bonavista	231

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is an historical occupational folklife of producing salt codfish on the east coast of Newfoundland, roughly spanning the 1920s through to the 1950s, and focused mainly in the community of Bonavista. As such, it is concerned first and foremost with the evidence, memories, perceptions, and words of the men, women, and children who participated in the salt fishery. Their understandings and explanations profoundly inform and instruct what I have written in this thesis and I am convinced that is how it should be. Processing salt fish¹ subsumes every step that followed the moment fresh round fish was unloaded from a boat at a stage head, and taken into the "splitting stage," through to the moment that the salted, dried final product was sold to a merchant for export to various markets around the world (see figure 1.1 to 1.4).² Between these moments there were three distinct phases of processing: first, cleaning and splitting; followed by salting; then, after the fish had sat a specified time in salt, they were washed one by one and dried out of doors in the wind and sun. This washing and drying phase was known in some places as "making fish," while in other places the entire process -- cleaning, salting and drying -- was called by the same term.

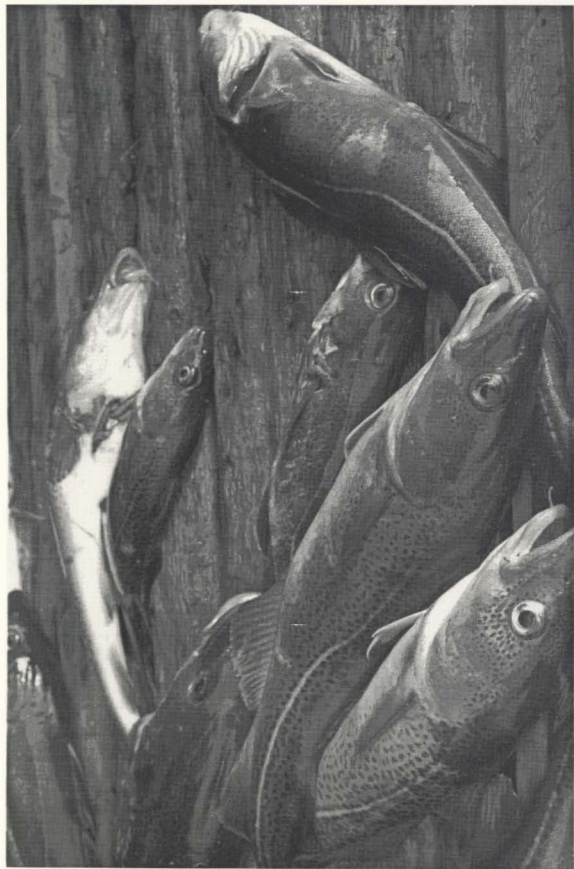
The catching and curing of salt fish for export was the *raison d'être* of the

¹The term commonly for used for cod fish in Newfoundland is simply "fish." Other species are called by their common names, e.g., salmon, herring, caplin. Whenever the term fish is employed on its own, the reader can safely assume that the species cod is implied.

²Round fish is fish direct from the water that has not been processed in any way -- cut, gutted, headed or split. Stages were the structures in which much of the processing of salt fish was carried out. Fish were unloaded from boats at the stage, a part of which was built over the water in order to allow the boats access. All stages were connected either directly or by a bridge to the land. The stage head was the part of the structure furthest out over the water where boats unloaded their catches. The stage head had a very broad ladder constructed from poles (called "strouters") and rails that allowed access between the stage and the boat. See figure 1.3 and 1.4 for photos of typical stages and stage heads.

2

**Figure 1.1: Round codfish on the floor of Dan Greene's stage,
Tilting, Fogo Island.**



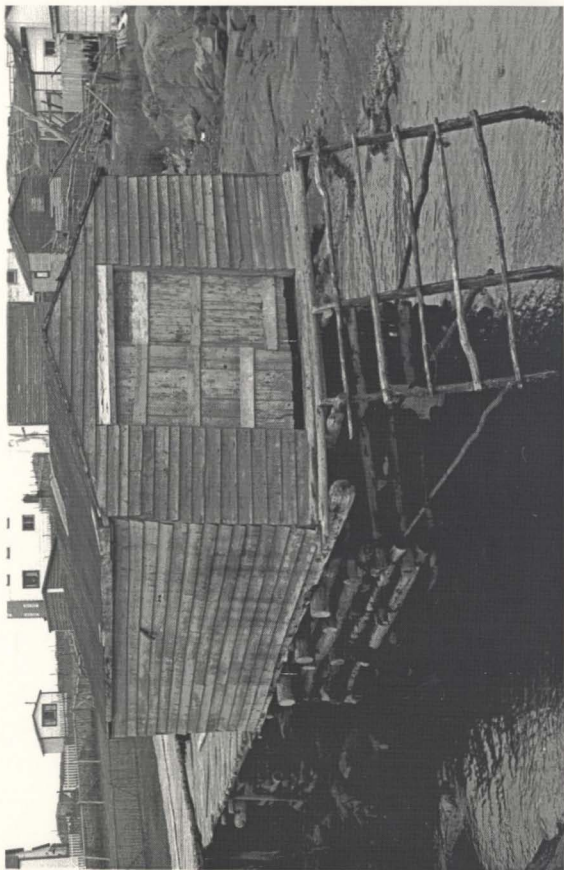
**Figure 1.2: Cleaned, split, salted, and drying codfish
on a flake in New Bonaventure, Trinity Bay
(Photo courtesy of Brian Miller and the
Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive).**



**Figure 1.3: Splitting stage, stage head, and salting stage (circa 1940s),
Old Cove, Cape Bonavista
(Photo courtesy of Wilson Whiffen, Bonavista).**



**Figure 1.4: Stage and stage head, Tilting, Fogo Island
(Photo courtesy of Gerald Pocius).**



majority of Newfoundland's population since the first Europeans began fishing its waters on a seasonal basis over four hundred and fifty years before. By the 1950s, however, the conversion to the fresh-frozen fishery had begun. This thesis is about the work processes of salt-fish making during this century, but these had dominated the lives of most people on this island from its earliest settlement.³ In the next ten to twenty years the last men and women who participated fully in it will have passed on. Too little work has been done to date on the everyday world of making fish -- the practices, techniques and complex knowledge required to do the work well and produce high quality salt fish. The memories of an entire fishing people and their culture are quickly fading. Therefore, despite the cautionary rhetoric of the proponents of the devolutionary premise (not to mention the related problematic implications of carrying out salvage research), I find myself, as a folklorist, concerned with attempting to record and capture, however limited the record might be, literally dying traditions that need, in various senses, to be salvaged.⁴

³As will become clear there was a remarkable stability of traditional technique and practice over literally hundreds of years.

⁴The "devolutionary premise" refers to a concept in folklore theory originated by Alan Dundes in the late 1960s. It described the almost formulaic nature of the reports of various early antiquarians and folklorists in their frequent and often overly alarmist predictions that such-and-such a form of lore was clearly on its last legs, almost moribund and so forth. In many cases, such claims were exaggerated and the material continued to healthily resurface every generation or two (albeit, often in modified forms) in another report or collection, that, as often as not, re-predicted the form's imminent demise (Dundes 1969). Often such claims became rationales for the research agendas of further zealous collecting (before the last text disappeared). This impulse was based on another perhaps faulty, slightly lame premise that texts in and of themselves would somehow preserve the cultures that produced them. On the other hand, in many cases, a strong argument can be made for all kinds of traditional materials dramatically fading from world cultures, for better or for worse, as a result of tremendous shifts engendered by the enormous scientific, economic, and socio-cultural upheaval of the last two hundred years. This is exactly the case with the vast complex of the knowledge, history, skills and traditions of the salt fishery. That world and worldview are quickly vanishing, likely forever, and will soon be

These goals are shared by many scholars, including George Ewart Evans (1977),⁵ George Sturt (1993), Maggie Holtzberg-Call (1992), Sally Festing (1977), John Feltham (1992, 8) and Raoul Andersen, the latter who commented on his own work on the Banks fishery of the early to mid twentieth century: "I have long felt that an imperative need exists to systematically record and order information about the dory schooner industry ... Thus, what an older generation of Newfoundlanders may remember or explain is a potential instructive heritage that merits our attention" (1977, 17).

John Widdowson, echoing these scholars, stated in 1987 that we are "at a watershed in our history," and that there is a critical need, at this juncture, to document and study "the continuity and change in language and tradition" (51). In part, that project of documentation includes recording what Ewart Evans called the "old prior culture(s)," their modes and methods, their patterns and expressive forms, laudable or not, before they are irrevocably lost (1977, 17). I hope this thesis makes a contribution to this project, primarily by documenting and describing in as much detail as I can those modes, methods and patterns, and, to a certain extent, exploring the interrelations between the everyday practices of the salt fishery and larger folkloric, cultural, socio-economic, and historic patterns in Newfoundland.

completely gone save the odd secondary source -- a scholarly (such as this one) or literary account or collection of texts.

⁵This is one example of many of this scholar's excellent studies of rural folklore and work and the complex traditional knowledge embedded in them (see also Ewart Evans 1962).

1.1 Approaches

Only a few thorough studies of the everyday practices of contemporary and historic Atlantic Canadian *fishing* cultures have been carried out and they focus largely on harvesting (for example, Geistdoerfer 1987; Mousette 1979). Academic studies that deal mainly with the everyday practices of processing salt cod in Newfoundland are even rarer. "The House that Poor Jack Built", Gerald Pocius's essay on the salt processing of cod and its architecture on Fogo Island, is perhaps the only concentrated academic inquiry into those practices, post 1850 (1992).⁶ Folklorists in Newfoundland have conventionally worked under the rubric of textual, generic, and performance analyses of social and cultural expressions (with a number of significant exceptions), whereas this work takes more of an ethnographic approach to its materials, and, in so doing, I hope it will provide much useful contextual information for the ongoing textual research.⁷

Throughout this thesis I will rely as much as possible on the words, descriptions, analyses and evaluations of the women and men who lived their lives in the salt fish era. I will frequently employ the full transcriptions of sections of

⁶There are a number of significant bureaucratic studies of the salt fisheries in this century. Only two of these provides thorough information and analysis of the practices of making salt fish -- MacPherson 1935 and the Newfoundland Commission of Enquiry into the Seafisheries ... 1937 (hereafter referred to as the "Newfoundland Commission 1937.") MacPherson's scientific report is particularly detailed and provides some of the best documentary explanations of salt-fish processing. He notes that his is "probably the first attempt at systematising the rule-of-thumb methods..." of the practices of the salt fishery (1935, 9).

⁷It is not surprising to find that the majority of ethnographic and folklife work comes from Québécois researchers, doing work in French speaking communities. As noted, there are significant English-Newfoundland exceptions, e.g., MacKinnon 1990, Murray 1979, Pocius 1991, Small 1979, Taylor 1982, and Casey 1971. Casey's and Small's work do have a textual focus, but are solidly grounded in the contemporary and historic ethnographic contexts of the communities with which they deal.

the interviews I had with these people. I have chosen this course for various reasons -- foremost is that those who lived it are the best qualified to speak of it.

In The Interrelationship of Work and Talk in a Newfoundland Fishing Community, Larry Small comments:

My research, done among men and women of all age groups, showed a strong correlation between occupation and talk. Men talked about little other than what they had done that day, the day before or even twenty or thirty years ago. It appears, therefore, that what they express is mediated by their everyday experiences.... I would estimate that between 85 and 95% of talk among fishermen revolves around their work. Moreover, their expressive behaviour pertaining to work is through the medium of personal narrative.... Unlike the more traditional genres, personal narratives are so embedded in everyday talk that they do not have to be requested by the researcher. (1979, 102-104).

Work was and is central to people's talk and their identities everywhere in the world, and is no less so in Newfoundland fishing communities. Small's assertions concerning the prevalence of talk about work in everyday conversation jibe very much with my own investigations and the comments of many others,⁸ and it was this very fact that led me to begin to wonder about what the day to day work in the salt fishery was like, what went on, and who did what. During an interview with Heber John Keel of Bonavista I asked him what kinds of talk went

⁸See for example Lloyd's and Mullen's comments in *Lake Erie Fishermen*:

The idea of the "fishermen's point of view" seemed to stimulate some fishermen to discuss the political and economic situation of the entire occupation; in other cases, especially with older or retired fishermen, the idea was taken as a stimulation for more personal recollections. In most cases, particularly in the course of repeated interviews, both senses of the idea seemed to govern their conversation with us. We were open to whatever kind of traditional lore we might encounter and were actively seeking folk beliefs, weather signs, proverbs, legends, and jokes. However, these kinds of folklore were not forthcoming; instead, the fishermen usually talked about their own experiences, and we shifted our attention to these personal experience narratives. (1990, xi-xii)

on in their stage while cleaning fish. This was his reply:

Oh no boy, the only thing you'd be talking about, perhaps about the other fellow, berths of so-and-so, you know, so-and-so had 60 quintals⁹ or 50 quintals yesterday ... This is the talk was going on. And perhaps you was talking about the trap¹⁰ -- "I wonder is ours right -- 'cause we only had perhaps 5 or 6 quintals out of it-" you know- "I wonder if we got the leader right, boy, I wonder has a whale gone through it," and all this kind of stuff you know... "Ah, we'll go tomorrow and we'll- [go] over all the leader and see what's happening, so-and-so-" you know --they'd be talking about stuff like this, you know [MF: Ok] By and by, you'd be looking out -- "Who's that going up there boys?" "Oh, you got another fellow with a load." Perhaps there'd be 3 or 4 fellows behind him with a load, you know -- that's what we was talking about -- looking at stuff like that ... All fishing work! That's what we was talking about- talking about your work, your own work, your fishing work ... (MF-2/3)¹¹

A number of other people talked in similar terms of the daily conversation that went on (MF-12/13; MF-1). In many senses this talk about work and one of its main vehicles, the personal experience narrative, could be called an emic genre. It is not surprising then to find that, given the correlation of work and talk, that a good deal of that talk was given over to evaluating the techniques and capabilities

⁹The quintal was the 112 lb unit weight by which dried salt fish was bought and sold. Fishing people, intimately involved with catching and making fish commercially, often spoke of fish in its conventional measure of exchange.

¹⁰The cod trap is a type of fishing gear -- basically a very large box constructed from nets and with a one-fathom wide doorway. Another net, called a "leader," was run from the land or a shoal out through the doorway, leading fish into the trap. Traps could have perimeters up to eighty fathoms and be over ten fathoms deep. See chapter five for further details.

¹¹This citation form "MF-2/3" refers to the tape-ordering system I used to organise my research materials. This number MF-2/3 refers to tapes two and three (an interview with Mr. Keel) of the "MF" collection of my own fieldwork tapes. The other collection of interviews used in the thesis -- identified by the prefix "NFM-" -- consists of tapes of interviews I conducted for the Newfoundland Museum. A full explanation of this system and listing of all the interviews can be found in appendix 1. All tapes and related research materials have been deposited into the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) and can be accessed there (see appendix 1).

of one's self and others in the productive work of the community.

In assessing this work and its relationship to fishing people's lives and worldview, I take my lead from the emically based occupational folklife work of McCarl (1978 and 1980), Holtzberg-Call (1992), and Lloyd and Mullen (1990). Their approaches are all linked by a common focus:

The complex of techniques, customs, and modes of behaviour which characterise a particular work group comprises its occupational folklife.... Occupational expression is inextricably linked to the work processes and micro-environments in which it functions, and therefore the study of these processes demands a comprehensive view of the relationship between the forms of communication and the environment in which they occur (McCarl 1978, 3-4).

Don Yoder expresses similar sentiments with Theodore Blegen, asserting that we must "grapple with the need of understanding the small everyday elements, the basic elements in large movements ... the importance of the simple, however complex and subtle the problem of understanding the simple may be" (1976, 6).

McCarl's work along with much other occupational folklife and folklore work has focused on the micro-processes of contemporary existing occupations and so has had the benefit of observing techniques, practices and expressions firsthand. Given that the salt fishery has not been carried on commercially for over thirty years or more, I do not have this luxury, but I feel that there is a clear place for historical ethnography. Yoder has pointed out that it "seems clear that we continue to need both the historically oriented reconstructions of earlier stages of our present culture and the sociologically and anthropologically oriented analysis of present-day forms of culture, urban or rural" (1976, 10). In this sense my work is an historical occupational folklife, and follows on the work of many others

(Holtzberg-Call 1992; and in sociology and oral history, Bochel 1979; Butcher 1987; Lummis 1985; Thompson *et al.* 1983). Again, as Yoder has stated, "folklore studies insists on historical as well as ethnographic methodology..." (1976, 5).

To offset these limitations, I intend to use numerous transcriptions of many of the interviews I conducted even though this will add a great deal of bulk to the thesis. The use of transcriptions has various important points to recommend it (Holtzberg-Call 1992, 19). The words of the actual participants in the industry, describing their work and lives often speak more plainly and eloquently on any number of topics than I could ever do.¹² Patrick O'Flaherty has written of the people who lived in the salt-fish era: "They inhabited a separate universe of back-breaking labour which cannot be understood by anybody who did not live in it" (1975, 4). I believe this to be essentially true, and as much as possible, I will let people who did experience this universe speak for themselves.

I hope the transcriptions will also highlight that this work is as much authored by the people who gave freely and generously of their time and expertise as it was by me. Three of these people -- Laura Whiffen and May and Wilson Hayward -- are pictured in Figures 1.5 and 1.6. Too often academics, whether accidentally or not, appropriate much of the credit for work that they did not, in many real senses, do. The people who helped me are in no uncertain terms, the active co-authors of this work.

¹²Another benefit of using numerous transcriptions is that in doing so I highlight the existence of huge collections of other like materials in archives such as the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, where the bulk of my taped interviews, photographs *et al.* are housed (MUNFLA accession #s 95-625 and 95-626). Too often, the actual materials behind a thesis remain hidden. I hope my use of transcriptions provide readers with a sense of the quality and usefulness that such recordings and collections have, as well as indicate what a rich cultural and academic resource resides in these institutions.

Figure 1.5: Mrs. Laura Whiffen at home, Bonavista.



Figure 1.6: Mrs May and Mr. Wilson Hayward at home, Bonavista.



As well, the less I try to tell the story the better, for there is a great risk of poor translation, arising from the fact that I am at a second remove from the practices I hope to evoke and explain (and even at a third remove given my outsider status in Newfoundland). I never had and never will have a chance to observe men and women cleaning, salting, and drying fish on the scale that it once was, yet, despite the resulting potential for errors, I feel that this project is worthwhile and important, and that a beginning needs to be made in describing the everyday work of making salt fish. Any that follow can hopefully improve upon this study. In the meantime, the responsibility for any errors found here are mine and mine alone.

I have a central theoretical reason for putting the words of those who lived the life first and foremost. Much of the theoretical basis for this thesis is found in contemporary folkloric analyses of the last twenty years, particularly the occupational folklife, traditional folklife, and community studies listed above. Many of the best of these have as a guiding tenet the principle that any academic or externally applied interpretation or model that is constructed must be grounded in and on the observations, perceptions, interpretations, and models of the people with whom we academics work (Pocius 1991, 7-10). This work tries to do exactly that.

Folklore and folklife scholars, along with many others in related disciplines involved in work with people in communities, are endeavouring more and more to carry out such emically grounded research. A basic respect for and belief in the humanity and agency of the people we work with must underlie all our research. Conceiving of ourselves as dispassionate observer-scientists testing hypotheses and

of people living in communities as so-called subjects of social science research experiments is hopefully becoming as outmoded as it is distasteful.¹³

This thesis privileges the words and ideas of the people who lived as fishery workers in the salt fish era, and these words and ideas provide a basic body of material against which my ideas and interpretations can be tested. This is a circular argument I know, for finally I decide which quotations to use and these could clearly be manipulated to support my arguments -- but this is a danger inherent to all writing, rhetoric, and discourse, no matter how objective or scientific it purports to be. On the other hand, I hope that finally the weight and the quality of fishing people's evidence, directly quoted and presented, will help to verify that I have presented at least a little of the truth they have to tell. Their truths are no more or less valid than anyone else's -- academic, politician, merchant, or bureaucrat.

Shannon Ryan has written about the personal narrative as historical document: "What is important is the fact that, to many people, history is not necessarily what actually happened, but what they think happened" (Ryan 1977, 4). This attitude is shared by other analysts (for example, Lummis 1985, 1), but I would argue that the implied bias of individual perception applies as frequently to the academic working with documentary sources as to anyone else. As researchers, historians, for example, privilege certain types of sources -- often the documents and records of literate élites -- finding in them certain 'facts' they

¹³Despite their many strengths, many of the anthropological studies of Newfoundland communities of the 1960s and early 1970s suffer from this tendency: for specific examples, see Faris 1973, viii, 57. Other examples include Firestone 1967 and Chiaravante 1970. Mind you, I am not claiming that the research and writing coming out of folklore at this same time did not suffer equally from their own shortcomings.

believe to be indicative of a truth or truths, once corroborated, usually by as many other such elite sources. In this thesis, I privilege facts and perceptions and ideas and all of these come from people who lived through a period, doing a particular kind of work -- harvesting and processing fishing. I see very little difference in the veracity of one source over the other.

Facts, ideas, analysis and complex interpretations emerge from their thoughts and words, and many of these are corroborated by other fishing people's words and by documentary sources. Patterns of meaning and perception, understandings of what happened to them in their lifetimes are expressed in their talk and I hope to identify and explore some of these in this work. I am convinced that these patterns and understandings speak a truth as valid as anything an academic could formulate about their lives and world. In fact, much of what fishing people have to tell could never be told by the mercantile accounts and the voluminous Colonial Office papers that have been so painstakingly poured over by many fine historians, historical geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and folklorists.

Making fish began at the point when cod was forked up from boats at the stage head and went through the initial phases of cleaning and salting. This was carried out as quickly as possible in order to maintain good quality. In the cleaning phase, three or more people stood around what was known as a splitting table, usually in a splitting stage (See figure 1.7). The first person, called a cut-throat, literally cut the throat of the fish and then made a second cut down its belly. The second person, known as a header, hauled out the fish's guts, tore its

**Figure 1.7: Interior of Stanley Waterman's stage, Deep Bay, Fogo Island
(Photo courtesy of Gerald Pocius).**



head off and passed it to the splitter. The splitter quickly and skilfully split the fish open to its tail along its sound- or back-bone, laying it open, and then cut out the majority of that bone. Fish was usually washed quickly and then carried to a salter whose job was to cast salt on each and every split fish, laid open on its back.

After it sat in salt for a prescribed period depending on the type of salting employed, the last phase -- drying -- began. The fish was taken from the salt, scrubbed clean with water and cloths or brushes, then usually left in a pile called a waterhorse to drain for a time. Following that, it was carried outdoors and up onto flakes where it was laid out to dry (See figure 1.8).¹⁴ With light-salted fish (the main class of fish examined in this thesis) this drying period could last anywhere from twelve days up to six weeks depending on weather, the size of the fish, and the curing method used to salt it (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 47). Over a period of days, the final drying phase occurred, with fish becoming increasingly hard and dry, as it was spread, piled, re-spread, and re-piled.¹⁵

¹⁴Flakes were large wooden platforms built from posts and shores, covered with long narrow logs called longers and on top of these, spruce boughs on top of which fish was laid.

¹⁵This synopsis of making fish is based on the production of a particular class of salt fish that was most common to the inshore fishery previous to the 1950s -- the famous Newfoundland light-salted fish, made on the flakes and beaches of the island, dried by the sun and wind. One particular sub-class of this grouping, known as pickled fish, serves as the representative type for description in chapters three and four of this thesis (this kind of fish was made in Bonavista, the main community focused on in this study). Pickled fish was salted in watertight containers and let sit for a very short period of three to five days. The other, more dominant type of light-salted fish was dry salted in bulks for periods that ran from three days to a number of weeks, sometimes even months.

A bulk (or pound), was a kind of enclosure or container constructed inside of a fishing stage for holding fish as it cured in salt. They were built with planks and posts into the existing structure of the building. It was not designed to be watertight and the pickle coming off fish seeped out through the longers of the floor. The bulk's size, length and depth depended on individuals' particular methods and the kind of salting being carried out. Width was fairly standard, based on the salter being able to reach the back fish to salt them properly. They tended to get built as the season progressed. As each bulk filled, a new one was added in the remaining empty space on a stage (Pocius 1992, 89-90). As fish could stay in salt for long periods (depending on how heavily it was salted), one stage could

.

contain many bulks.

Heavier salted classes of fish (also made in bulks), typical of various offshore ship fisheries -- e.g., the Banks and the Labrador fisheries -- had different levels of salting and drying techniques and they produced very different qualities of fish. These variations of processing and product are described and compared in chapter five.

Figure 1.8: The Moulands' Flake, Mockbeggar, Bonavista.



It is the prolonged and intricate set of practices and steps that I will initially describe in chapters three to five -- the "terms, tools, techniques, and tales" of the occupation of making light-pickled fish (Holtzberg-Call 1992, 56). To do so I will rely largely on the tapes of my interviews with men and women from the community of Bonavista where they made the light-pickled fish just described. A number of other interviews with men and women who made this same kind of fish in other places will also be used to aid in the descriptions. Pickled fish was the lightest salted fish of all the varieties and for that reason required the most complex and risky drying process of all, but when made correctly it also produced the thickest and objectively the best quality fish.¹⁶

In this century it seems that mainly communities in Trinity and Conception Bays made this class of fish on a commercial scale all using the same sorts of buildings and techniques. As such, this thesis and its descriptions constitute what could be called a case study of pickling fish and the fishing operations that employed its methods more so than a study of a particular community or set of communities. Although I am concerned primarily with work processes and techniques, other modes of making fish will be referred to and reflected on from time to time (especially light-salted inshore fish made in bulks), but this will be

¹⁶I will also carefully employ a good deal of evidence and data from a number of student papers housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive. These papers detail salt-fish making from a number of other communities -- some where pickled fish dominated, but others where dry-salted bulk fish did. These papers provide both corroboration of many details of technique and practice, but variations on these as well. It is clear that certain steps and methods of salt fish processing were more or less universal: for example, cleaning and splitting varied little from place to place and from salt-fish class to salt-fish class. Others were less standard -- degrees and modes of salting and drying strategies varied over space and in the various types of fisheries being prosecuted. In employing the comparative data of these sources I have kept the many complex variants of the salt fisheries constantly in mind so that the distinctions of kind and style do not become confused.

done cautiously and only when such comparisons are useful or appropriate.

Again, I am concerned mainly with the light-salted processes of the inshore fisheries. As will become clear the detailed description of even just the pickled class indicates just how complex methods and techniques were. When other classes of fish and the styles used to make them are brought into the discussion, the picture becomes even more complicated. It is this complexity that is not generally taken into account (or even totally understood) in many academic treatises on the salt fisheries. Even some of the best suffer from confusions regarding the distinctions outlined above, and this in itself provides another rationale for the writing of the present work.¹⁷

No matter what class of fish was being made, the set of practices employed had one basic end: the production of the best quality of salt fish possible. Once the steps were complete, fish had to be graded or culled according to its look and quality, and sold to merchant houses for export. All the labour of a summer led to this moment of judgement for family fishing operations, and it was this moment and the earnings that resulted, be they good, fair, or poor, that determined the quality of life for the coming winter, year in and year out.

I stated earlier that facts, ideas, analysis, complex interpretations and patterns of meaning and understanding emerge from people's thoughts and words. Maggie Holtzberg-Call in her study of printers and the printing culture asserts that occupational groups create over time and through individual tellings and retellings, a canon of "key texts" that define "key events," the lessons they teach, and what is

¹⁷For example, Alexander in *The Decay of Trade* does not make particularly clear the differences between pickled and light, dry-salted fish in bulks, an issue of some importance to his arguments (Alexander 1977, 45, 75). His book is one of the better studies on the industry and trade.

most important to printers as individual members of a particular group (1992, 20; also Lloyd and Mullen 1990, xxiv). She argues in her introduction that though these texts display elements of the traditional aesthetics and patterns of story-telling, *et al.*, this does not necessarily take away from the truth of those texts, their lessons or their importance.

The key ideas and texts that emerged from my talks with people who lived in the era of the salt fishery assemble around four fundamental themes. The first recurring idea concerns the complexity of making fish, a process that seems on first glance to be largely heavy manual and menial work involving little technical or skilled labour. The processing of salt fish and its technologies have been typified (at times a little pejoratively) as pre-industrial and primitive. These sorts of depictions demonstrate an ignorance of the complexity and skill demanded by much of the seemingly basic manual work done for centuries in occupations such as farming and fishing and their related trades.¹⁸ John Burnett has written of agricultural work, and I assert it is equally true of making fish, "Traditionally regarded as an unskilled occupation, farm work in fact demanded many and varied kinds of skill, acquired not by formal apprenticeship but by equally long experience" (1984, 30).

The work of numerous ethnographers, folklife scholars, oral historians (many mentioned above), and historians including Burnett has shown this to be the

¹⁸This is not to deny the fact that fish making techniques remained remarkably consistent through hundreds of years. Compare for example many of the contemporary descriptions in chapters three and four of this thesis with accounts dating right back to 1676 (Downing 1676 (see appendix 2 of this thesis); Anspach 1971 [1810] and 1827, 430-46; Chappell 1818, 127-31; Collins 1682, 93; Devine 1990 [1915] 19-23; Jukes 1993 [1842], 102-03; MacPherson 1935; Millais 1907, 144-48; and Perley 1843, 93-4, 163-4).

case. George Sturt's early, remarkably honest and perceptive accounts of skilled trades, rural life and the like, are based on his own career in rural England as the operator of a wheelwright's shop (1993). His understanding of the complexity of that work and his deep respect and sympathy for the people who carried it out, come, again, from having lived and worked alongside them for many years -- an ideally emic vantage for any ethnographer, though not without its perils.¹⁹

I feel I am a poor imitation of Sturt, attempting long after the fact, to render sets of "tacit" or "local" knowledge and physical practice into a written text before it disappears. The very attempt to describe such things in written words is extremely problematic. They are best understood and learnt through observation and actually doing -- written words are a very poor substitute (Dormer 1994, 10-13).²⁰ Yet, try I must. Sturt wrote in his journals of producing or creating an effect through skilled labour (in relation to the processes of work that he observed closely for many years and participated in himself):

At the very moment of change, when the effort actually comes off and has its effect -- this keeps the "peasant" more or less satisfied, but "superior" people never experience that satisfaction.

The moment of effectiveness, when skill is changing the raw material into the desired product is always worth "realising." It is momentous every time... (Sturt 1967, II, 879-80)

Sturt was describing the skilled trades, including wheel-making. Such trades lend

¹⁹Years of hard work as the master of a small and not particularly profitable country wheelwright shop -- though his labour was mild by comparison to that done by the men who worked for him -- wore him out physically. His craft labours demanded so much time and effort that his contributions to our understanding of the world he came from were limited, much to our detriment

²⁰The reader will likely find some of the transcriptions in the following chapters frustrating for these very reasons. I know from experience how frustrating the second-hand description of a complicated set of techniques can be.

themselves more readily to the adjective "skilled," as they display and require very dextrous and complex technique and activity in general. The practitioners who have achieved via their practice a certain degree of that skill receive a certain amount of respect inside and outside their communities for having done so.

Some may argue that equating the work involved in the salt fishery with such skilled crafts and the status associated with them is at best stretching it, at worst, romantic and vaguely ludicrous. Certainly, with making salt fish, these status distinctions are less applicable. Every fishing family made fish all summer long, and every man, woman, and child involved was -- in folkloric parlance -- a tradition bearer. As for skill levels, a good deal of the work was simple, unskilled manual labour -- hauling, lifting, lugging, washing, turning, moving, piling, and unpling thousands and thousands of pounds of fish, day in, day out, year in and year out -- labour that is not particularly amenable to romanticization or for being valorized as a skilled craft, or for distinguishing star tradition bearers. This is not to dismiss or denigrate that labour in any way. I have tremendous respect for the sheer physical costs, for its difficulties and even its dangers.

But it is also clear from the people who made fish in the inshore light-salted sector that a number of the steps involved in making fish required both fair amounts of dextrous technique (for example, splitting fish) and the complex, even expert knowledge derived from years of experience and traditional knowledge, passed from one generation to the next. In the salting and drying process many fine adjustments and complex decisions had to be made in response to the changing variables of the weather and the amount of fish landed. At least one scholar, David Alexander, has typified this work and its product as "a handicraft"

(1977, 75).²¹ As well, a myriad of other tasks and skills were required to support the fisheries and the general day-to-day and seasonal rounds of life in pre-1950 Newfoundland. Proficiency was required in the complex work of house and boat building, subsistence agriculture, livestock raising, the cutting and collection of firewood, the knitting, sewing, preserving, cooking and baking, and the list goes on.

Much of it was work people could potentially be pleased with and proud of, whether on the basis of its quantity -- a large haul of fish or a good harvest of potatoes; or for the quality or neatness of the work -- people knew good fish when they saw it and they knew who was particularly good at making it; or for the speed and precision with which a job was done -- there are countless accounts of fast and accurate splitters. Such stories are not simply vanity or conceit (though fishermen are neither more nor less prone to bragging than any other group) -- they are about work and doing it well or doing it poorly, and they frequently have meanings and values implicit in them. Fast splitting was not valued because it proved one's prowess in some abstract competitive sense. Fast splitting was valued because it helped get fish cleaned and under salt more quickly, which in turn improved the quality of the final product. Accurate splitting was important because it meant that valuable pounds of fish were not lost during the splitting process. As well, accurate splitting improved the look and quality of the fish which greatly affected

²¹But a mass produced one. In 1894 light-salted fish accounted for approximately 41% of the total catch of just over a million quintals of fish (though this number is likely low given that light-salted fish was made on the Labrador as well -- the other large contributor to total catch that year). In 1911 it accounted for 64% of just over 1.2 million quintals, and in 1921, 68% of just over 1.3 million (Census of Newfoundland 1894, 1911, and 1921). In 1935 it accounted for approximately 75% of the total catch (no total catch figure given) (Newfoundland Commission, 1937, 112).

the grading and thus the price of the fish when it was sold. In chapters three to five of this thesis I make the case for the complexities and techniques demanded in the production of good quality salt fish and detail the commitment and determination required by fishing people to carry out the vast quantities and quality of work involved in making fish.

A second key idea was highlighted evocatively by Patrick O'Flaherty in his short essay, "Looking Backwards: The Milieu of Old Newfoundland Outports." In it he asserts that living and working in the salt fishery were tremendously labour-intensive undertakings, often brutally laborious (1975). Though I disagree with the extent to which he takes this argument and what he claims it explains about Newfoundland culture -- over and over again, the men and women I talked with expressed this seemingly basic idea in all sorts of telling ways to me. People talked of a past of almost unimaginable hard work, regularly using words such as "slavery" and "murder" to describe it, recalling the labour demanded by that world with ruefulness and, on occasion, bitterness. Their evocations of exceptionally long hours of brutal labour and exertion were the norm.²² These were contrasted with the modern era and its labour-saving technologies in both the occupational and the domestic realms -- nowadays all one had to do was "push a button," and work was done. This idea took on a formulaic quality as my fieldwork progressed -- men and women both using it frequently.

²²One woman spoke of how the summer fishery and garden work were so demanding and so important economically that they took precedence over all other concerns, even, at times, the immediate short-term needs of children. This was not overly harsh and it was for these children's long-term welfare that the fish and gardens had to take this precedence. In many families from the young ages of six and seven, children were expected to help out with all kinds of work. This served the dual purpose of accomplishing more work and of beginning their apprenticeship in the rigours of the life they too would eventually be leading.

The idea could and can be dismissed as a kind of anti-nostalgic critique of the younger generation, whose lives are so much easier, and who often take that ease for granted. From time to time when it was invoked, it was done partially to do just that, but as or more often it took on a more complex significance -- a marker alerting the listener to a historical reality of hardship and grinding manual labour (generally for very little reward). The people who used it were struggling to explain to me hardship and labour that could not be demonstrated or imagined by those who were not part of that world.

Their reasons for pointing this out were usually not to critique or sermonize, but to explain and teach me about a vanished world. I hope to capture via their descriptions, memories, and stories of the day to day, step by step work of processing cod, something of the quality of the sheer work that was central to the salt fishery before the 1950s.

A third key idea in this entire complex world of work that has been frequently underrated, minimized and ignored and which I hope to explore is the role of women in making fish (Porter 1993, 5, 39-41, 48). Apart from the odd passing reference to their role in "helping with the fish" and running the domestic sphere (no small feat given that it included literally dozens of major and laborious responsibilities inside and outside the home), there have been few works that demonstrate their integral role to maintaining fishing operations and directly and sizably contributing to the incomes of their families by making fish.

Part of the explanation for this lack of coverage lies in the fact that there has been an imbalance of studies of fish harvesting over fish processing (harvesting has tended to be a male domain, while processing in the salt fishery has often been

female). This fact becomes readily apparent with any cursory analysis of the academic, bureaucratic, and popular literature of the fisheries (Allison et al 1989; Butler 1983; Faris 1973; Firestone 1967; Gilmore 1990; Lloyd and Mullen 1990; Lummis 1985; Lund 1983; Martin 1979; Matthiessen 1986; Mousette 1979; Mullen 1978). Women academics themselves also often focused on male realms within fishing communities and male academic paradigms (Festing 1977; Geistdoerfer 1987; McCay 1976, 1979). Men have historically and traditionally been the authors and subjects of most academic and popular analyses of occupation, society and culture, at all levels. So, for example, in the above list of texts on harvesting, Faris and Firestone, though ostensibly writing about community, end up focusing on male spheres, spheres that occupy the foreground of the public social and cultural domains.

Works that could be called exceptions to this rule are: Antler 1981; Bochel 1979; Butcher 1987; Johnson 1988; Murray 1979; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988 though in many of these harvesting shares the focus equally with processing. Fortunately the imbalance is slowly being addressed (see Neis 1993 and Porter 1993 for excellent bibliographies), but there is still a large gap to be closed.

One of the few exceptions to this under-reporting in relation to the Newfoundland salt fishery is Hilda Chaulk Murray's *More than 50%*, a thorough folklife of women's work and life in Elliston, five miles from Bonavista (1979). My findings, based on interviews made over twenty years after her research was conducted, bear out many of her observations and conclusions regarding the role of women in processing salt fish and in her important ethnographic contribution to women and their roles in rural Newfoundland in the first half of the twentieth

century. These corroborations no doubt have much to do with the fact that Murray and I did much of our work in the same general vicinity, down at the tip of the Bonavista Peninsula, but my field and documentary research elsewhere support the general thesis that women played a similar role around much of Newfoundland, especially its east coast -- women were the primary fish makers in most places.

Indeed, it is the exception rather than the rule for men to have played this role (Porter 1993, 47). In describing the everyday work of making fish, this thesis will hopefully advance the project of uncovering and reinstating the complex contribution of women to the fishing communities of Newfoundland and the role that work played in their lives. My evidence indicates that women derived status, esteem, and identity from their work in the salt fisheries and the nature of that work had various other beneficial attributes.²³ These are discussed in chapter four and the conclusion.

The system of grading and exchange provides a focus for the fourth significant or key theme and relates directly to the tremendous intensity and complexity of the labour, mentioned earlier. My analysis will focus on fishing people's perceptions of the result of their intense and complex labours -- the sale or exchange of fish for goods. Here I will diverge slightly from the usual approach taken by the occupational folklife studies that I have otherwise emulated. They have tended to focus their theoretical analysis of emic materials back onto the people they study themselves (Holtzberg-Call 1992, xv; Lloyd and Mullen 1990,

²³One of the down sides of the salt fishery's economic relations was that women did not receive direct remuneration for their labour. The payment of most women for their work came via their husband's part or share of the season's catch (or "voyage" as it was called) -- they were not entitled to it directly or the control of it. This was not a beneficial attribute of the structure of the fishery.

xxv) or made contributions to abstract theory building -- "The study of occupational groups holds great promise for increasing our understanding of the rules underlying communication processes in general ..." (McCarl 1978, 17).

In my exploration of fishing people's views of the economic system within which they operated, I turn this type of approach around and take as a starting assumption that their accounts and critiques of that system and world are significant and valid evidence -- important contributions to the understanding of the debates surrounding the history and economics of the salt fisheries. In short, I believe that these accounts must take an active role in those debates.

Through to the 1950s "shore" fish -- that is light-salted and hard-dried fish -- the prime product of the Newfoundland inshore fishery, was sold by the grade. Men known as cullers were employed by the merchants to grade or cull loads of fish being bought from fishing operations. Once graded, the cash value of the fish was recorded and credited against the past, current, and future purchases on account with the firm. Rarely did this transaction actually result in an exchange of cash.

These relationships of exchange, the cull and the credit system (or truck system as it was also known), were widely regarded as problematic -- that is, unfair and exploitative. Culling as an activity was very suspect and fishermen (men were the ones usually present at the cull and the sales were made in their names) had and have many examples of just how that unfairness was perpetrated. Fish prices were generally perceived to be set by a combine of oligarchic merchants residing in St. John's (and quite likely were, whether or not on a formal basis). Added to this, the prices of consumer goods were generally marked up at

about a rate of 20%, ostensibly to cover the risk of bad debts and accounts. This more or less hidden insurance cost, was generally added across the board to all prices for all customers, but sometimes customers purchasing their goods on a debit basis through the winter and the fishing season (generally a good fraction of the fishing families of the community) had another mark-up added to the cost of their purchases.

The negative perception of this combination of factors was only enhanced by the secrecy of merchant record-keeping and accounting practices which were accessible only to the literate. It is plain from my interviews with the majority of fishing people that the overall structure of these relations was viewed at best sceptically, and at worst, with out and out hostility. Families in the salt fishery usually lived very near to subsistence. Their food, for example, consisted of only the basics: flour, molasses, salt meat, tea -- "rough grub" as it was known -- and this was augmented by the growing of their own root vegetables and the picking of berries. As well, they cut and collected their own firewood. All of these activities indirectly and substantially subsidized the merchants and government since these actors did not have to worry about whether the price they paid for the fish completely supplied fishers with all the requisite goods needed for survival.

In one way these manifestations of "occupational pluralism," as it has been called, developed the remarkable talents for self-sufficiency of Newfoundland families (Handcock and Sanger 1981, 18). In another way, all of this work demanded tremendous year-round exertions. So, for example, men and women in the midst of the incredibly busy fishing season had to make time to lug fish manure and caplin up to their gardens where usually women and their daughters

spread it in to their vegetables.

Finally, the question that many fishing people asked and continue to ask is: was all of this work worth the tremendous costs in strain and toil that it exacted? The majority of the men and women I spoke with answered this question in many complex ways, but generally with a decided no. In chapter six of this thesis I will explore some of their reasons for finding grave fault with the system that determined much of their quality of life, a system they were forced to rely on through good and bad times. In this regard I take my lead from McCarl's critique of his own early work.²⁴ I attempt to build on to his basic approach of micro analysis in order to explore the interconnections of that analysis with external factors and forces (such as the role of the cull and the system of credit or truck).

John Burnett states the following regarding what had begun to be typified as low-status, unskilled agricultural labour in England through the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth:

Their work was often monotonous drudgery, carried on in all weathers and, at some seasons, for immensely long hours, and with very little aid from machinery until late in the century; on the other hand, they lived in village communities, worked with a measure of independence, spent their days in the open air and were part of a social system which provided an ordered and structured life. (1984, 30)

These statements reflect very closely the realities of the salt fishery as described to me. Though the work was extremely hard and people lived close to subsistence much of the time, there were benefits and clearly positive aspects to this way of living. These were remembered fondly and expressed to me by many people even

²⁴McCarl points out in his dissertation "a ... criticism of the model is that it doesn't place enough importance on extra-occupational concerns and activities as these flow around and through the work culture..." (1980, 36).

though many of their memories came from the era of the Great Depression which was one of the lowest points in the last century of the salt fishery. To dismiss these expressions out of hand as examples of misplaced and romantic nostalgia on fishing people's parts is a disservice to the truth of what their world was like, and disrespectful of the people that lived in it.

There are many wonderful and fascinating modern and historical accounts of the more pleasurable aspects of outport life that focus on diverse topics such as childhood, customs, celebrations and pastimes. These include Christmas, mummering, berry-picking, trouting, visiting and socialising generally, and even the fishing work itself (and the list goes on: see for a few examples Devine 1990; Feltham 1992; Hussey 1981; Margaret 1980; Miffen 1983; Murray 1979; Tilly 1958a, 1958b; Tizzard 1984). There is no question that the bustle and activity of the fishing season was a time of vitality, promise, vigour, and hope (Devine 1990; O'Flaherty 1995; NFM-35/36/37). As well, at times, making fish in stages and on flakes was very social work. Many women and documentary sources mention this feature of especially the flake work -- a feature still remembered fondly (and sadly missed) in the modern era. Many of the people I talked with confirmed all of these positive impressions (see for example my interviews with Wilson Hayward, Laura Whiffen, and Melita Guy -- NFM-35/36/37; MF-14/15; MF-17/18).

This vantage though, must constantly be balanced by the fact that at the same time, it was a very hard often unforgiving world, and many fishing people lived literally much of their lives only a few notches above subsistence. There is and was a seemingly contradictory quality in the depictions of this world, its ways of life, and its limited rewards. This contradiction was summed up nicely by Joan

Russell in a student paper:

As each of my informants looked back on the hardships of his life, he said, "How did we ever do it?" This question always followed with the statement, "but we were happy!", and this is the marvel. From talking with them, I feel they really were happy. (1971, 2)

In chapters six and seven I will contend that such statements are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive of each other. The people I talked with did and still do recognise both qualities as existing simultaneously in their lives. Those lives were neither wholly idyllic and romantically pastoral, nor were they unremittingly harsh.

To close the thesis I will examine the accounts and interpretations of the salt fishery during the Great Depression, an era that without doubt left many fishing people and their communities impoverished and desperate. Many of the people I talked with had just entered the prime of their lives during these tremendously difficult years. That era profoundly affected both the salt fishery and fishing people and their experiences in the 1930s indirectly contributed to the eventual demise of the salt fishery over the next two decades.

That demise radically transformed Newfoundland's landscapes, communities, society and culture, leading eventually to the massive dislocation and community resettlements of the 1950s and '60s.²⁵ I will bring the memories and analyses of people that lived through this era to bear onto the questions of what caused the post-war shifts to the fresh-frozen industry, concluding the thesis with a discussion

²⁵From the 1930s, through to the 1960s, many small salt fishing communities around the entire island on the coast of Labrador were either voluntarily vacated by their people or, especially late in the process, were actively 'encouraged' or coerced by governments to vacate their homes and move to centralised 'growth centre' communities, many organized around fresh-frozen fish processing and possessing better services for the most part, including very significantly, highways.

of how the transformation into the "modern" era and its new structures of work and ownership affected people's lives. I call into question some of the conventional wisdom regarding the panacea that these shifts supposedly proffered to the supposedly anachronistic and backwards communities of the salt fishery. Fishing people's evidence and perceptions have much to offer the complex debate of why (and if) this centuries-old industry had to be utterly abandoned so quickly. Their evidence challenges many of the depictions of and received wisdom concerning the shift from salt to fresh fish and its effects in rural Newfoundland, dovetailing with the work of a number of recent scholars (Pocius 1991; Sweeney 1995). I will argue that such so-called wisdom is flawed in its anti-romantic stereotyping and problematic isolating of a rural Newfoundland salt-fishing past versus a modern fresh-fishing present. It is nearly as flawed as the romanticized views of that past sometimes perpetrated by numbers of my ilk (folklorists).

Before launching fully into detailed descriptions and analysis, however, I need to provide a brief outline of how I will proceed through the rest of the thesis. It is broken into three basic sections. The first is introductory. It comprises this introduction and chapter two which familiarises the reader with the breadth and depth of the fieldwork and research that underpins the entire thesis and some key aspects of the inshore salt-fishing occupational contexts. My main purpose in sketching the range of my fieldwork is to alert readers to the complex nature and variety of the Newfoundland salt fisheries -- there were many sorts of fishing done from many different kinds of communities. I contend that coming to grips with the general though complex structure of those fisheries is important if one is to develop hypotheses or draw useful conclusions regarding the nature of any one

fishery, or more to the point, Newfoundland society and culture at large. With those distinctions in mind, I focus on the particular context with which I am concerned for much of this thesis -- the inshore headland light-salt fishery of communities such as Bonavista. In this part of the chapter, I examine certain key features of the micro-physical and the micro-social contexts of the inshore salt fishery in that community, attempting to familiarise the reader with how these places and operations were situated and organized on a number of levels. Descriptions, illustrations, and emic maps will provide a basic introduction to the world in which the work described throughout the rest of the thesis took place.

The second section of the thesis, comprising chapters three to five, forms the occupational folklife core of this work. In chapters three and four I examine the micro processes and practices of making pickled salt fish. I break down the work processes of making fish into their constituent chronological phases. I look first in close detail at the techniques and work routines of cleaning and salting. In these phases of the process there was an emphasis on dexterity, speed, and accuracy, all required to produce quality fish. In chapter four I consider the distinctive steps of the washing and drying phase of fish making. Here a different emphasis was required that featured the expert knowledge of the fish maker and her long years of drying experience in ever shifting weather conditions. Beyond detailing these steps and what they required of fishery workers *vis-à-vis* skills and labour, I hope to evoke through the words, narratives, and evaluations of fishing people, a full sense of how, at the height of the fishing season, the day to day world of salt fishery operated -- the incredible toil and "steady-go" of the work, the nature of the many and continual tasks and activities, how people coped with these

demands and the long hours required. I will also consider the positive and rewarding elements of the work and try to capture the look, feel, and even the sounds of the salt fishery. People's own descriptions and evaluations of this world of work are central to this project.

In chapter five I expand from the inshore, small-boat pickled fishery to consider a number of issues relating to variations in production and product in the industry. Again, the primary aim here is to alert readers to the complex nature of those fisheries. There were many variations of method and product. I hope to place the inshore, small boat, light-salted fishery and its products in relation to the modes and products of various other branches of the fishery. In doing so I will evaluate their relative importance and value in the overall industry, comparing and contrasting the characteristics and qualities of light-salted fish with other classes of fish. I will also look at the various salting choices that fishing people made in relation to the use of the cod trap, a widespread and powerful harvesting technology. In assessing these subjects, I will take issue with the contention that the processing skills of inshore fishery workers declined through the early decades of this century, a decline that supposedly contributed significantly to the overall decline of the industry. Other factors contributed more significantly to the decline of fish quality and to the industry itself. While some of these factors, such as the cod trap, were more or less directed and controlled by fishing people themselves, many others related to external forces impinging upon the people and the industry. The long term neglect of government and mercantile interests and the disorderly and cut-throat purchasing and exporting practices of the latter group were as or more responsible for the salt fishery's decline and eventual demise.

The final section of the thesis, chapters six and seven, considers the economic relations and realities of salt fish production. The groundwork laid in chapter five is crucial to understanding the equally complex discussion of the grading of fish and related economics in chapter six. It could be argued that these are, at best, tangential to the occupational folklife of making fish. I assert exactly the opposite. These complexities were part of that world and that life. The goal of good fish making was obtaining a good cull and a good price. Men and women were intimately involved with and aware of these complexities. Their lives and livelihoods were profoundly affected by them. It is no surprise that work and its economic rewards (or their lack) are and were frequently the passionate topics of discussion. Here, again, Lloyd's and Mullen's findings come to mind (1990, xi-xii).

In chapter six I explore fishing people's views of the economic relations of exchange in light-salted fishing communities. The ideas and themes that emerge from this discussion are developed further in chapter seven. I examine the seeming paradox of people's contradictory views of their lives in the salt fishery through to the 1950s. On one hand there is a rueful admission of the hardship, the toil, and the meagre earnings. At the same time many people also assert that those same lives, times, and communities were positive in many significant ways. I consider this contradiction, endeavouring to reconcile the disparate threads with an examination of their memories and documentary accounts of the frequently desperate times they lived through from the 1920s to the 1950s. Newfoundland was in profound crisis through much of that period and this dramatically increased the hardship of fishing people's already strenuous lives. Many people in

desperation abandoned the fishery and left Newfoundland, further weakening an industry that was already in difficulty. I then examine that industry's final demise with the shift to the fresh-frozen sector in the 1950s and 1960s, questioning whether that shift as it was carried out was completely necessary or judicious.

Throughout the thesis the significant ideas and themes outlined in this introduction regularly come to the fore. The tremendous demands of the labour, the complex and skilled techniques and routines and knowledge embodied in the making of fish (and people's fundamental pride in their ability to meet those demands), and the active and complex contribution of women all clearly figure in many of my arguments about how the fishery operated on micro and macro levels. Finally, an important goal of much of this work is to demonstrate how fishing people's understandings and analyses of their lives and times can (and must) fundamentally inform our understandings and analyses of larger social, cultural and economic issues.

The primary goal of all of these discussions though is to elucidate the complex world of the light-salted, inshore fishery in its no less complicated everyday manifestations. As described and explained by the women and men who lived and worked in it, the structures and patterns of that world of work routines, techniques, and products will hopefully emerge clearly. No full rendering of that neglected world has been attempted to date and I hope that this contribution inspires efforts to improve upon and expand on the materials contained here.

Chapter 2. Fieldwork: Methods and Contexts

In this chapter I wish to describe my fieldwork methods and experiences -- their geographic and temporal limits and their strengths and weaknesses. This self-reflexive act needs to be undertaken for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, I feel it is important to delineate those experiences to provide the reader with a sense of the work which grounds my analysis, interpretations, and conclusions. One could base assessments of the research for this thesis on various types of quantitative and qualitative criteria -- both breadth and depth are important, but finally neither amounts to much without the other.

I carried out over forty taped interviews for this project and had numerous informal conversations with dozens of men and women. Yet, if the quality of the rapport that I had with those men and women was poor and the quality of the resulting information also deficient, then no end of interviewing would have been enough. Conversely, three or four in-depth conversations with a knowledgeable, thoughtful woman or man on a particular topic might provide enough materials with which to write an entire thesis.

In this chapter, I will examine my fieldwork from a number of points of view. First I will consider my status as a more or less "unlearned" stranger attempting to come to grips with materials of which I had very little direct or indirect experience. Closely connected to this are issues of research methodology and the imposition of a "topic" with its set of pre-planned questions. I will discuss the strategies I employed in carrying out my work. I will then move on to an enumerative description of the actual research I conducted for this thesis. This allows me to explore some of the strengths and weaknesses of my fieldwork. One

particular issue I focus on in this section has to do with some of the problems I encountered in doing work with women.

I turn then to what I consider to be the main advantage of this type of research -- its breadth. I assert that given the complexity of the Newfoundland salt fisheries, only a grounded understanding of how various communities in different locales prosecuted those fisheries could have provided me with the broad frames of reference that I required to clearly analyse the particular inshore branch of salt-fish processing that I studied. Without an understanding of the multi-faceted industry, much of what I write here about making fish in Bonavista (and other inshore pickling and light-salting communities) would have been prone to reductionism, the overlooking of key features and distinctions, and any number of interpretive errors.¹ Some concrete examples of the differences that I am referring to are provided. This leads into the second section of the chapter which introduces the primary concern of this thesis -- the inshore light-pickled, small-boat fishery. Bonavista, the community in which I did most of my fieldwork, serves as a typical pickled-fish processing location which in fact it was for several centuries.

Finally, I will use examples from Bonavista to explore a number of aspects

¹This understanding might have been developed through careful reading of secondary sources, but as noted there are few of these that explain clearly the distinctions that I encountered in techniques from region to region. It was only after some months that I became completely aware of the basic distinctions between pickling and dry salting fish, never mind the various subtleties of either's production and results. Meanwhile I would assert that there are at least six distinct types of salt-fishing and processing variants: the inshore small boat fisheries of the island (that salted fish in two different fashions, in barrels and in bulks); the offshore Banks schooner (industrial) fishery that employed medium to heavy salting in the holds of large schooners; the Labrador stationer and floater (medium-sized schooner) fisheries that used a range of saltings and inshore harvesting methods "on the Labrador"; and small schooner fisheries -- especially particular in this century to the Placentia Bay area -- a middle-distant variant of the longer range offshore Banks fishery. This Placentia Bay schooner fishery employed the Banks schooners' techniques, technologies, and saltings. Chapter five provides brief descriptions of various aspects of a number of the above variants

of how the shore components of the pickled fishery and its processing were physically laid out and organised. As noted in the introduction, in these fundamental respects, Bonavista was not unique. Many communities in Trinity and Conception Bays made pickled fish. Consequently, in this chapter and throughout the thesis, I will draw attention to pertinent similarities and contrasts in methods and styles. These descriptions along with various illustrations (here and in chapter one) and maps provide readers with an important introduction to the physical micro-contexts in which light-pickled fish was made. These in turn establish a concrete locale, or frame, into which the processes detailed in chapters three and four can be placed by the reader.

2.1 In the Field: Methods and Issues

Ethnographic research is a complex human interaction between participants -- any number of factors can and do impinge upon what gets said by who, not least of which is the researcher's imposition of a research topic onto the encounter -- a topic that usually comes complete with pre-planned questionnaires and assumptions of what is and what is not important to ask or to know about (Briggs 1987, 21-23). Even seemingly neutral observation comes equipped with its own built-in assumptions and biases and the observer must and always will have an effect on the observed. The very terms of the activity of observation is in many respects problematic. It is a simple step for the "observed" to take on the status of a "subject" in a social science experiment and for the observer-researcher to begin studying and writing about people with such constructs in mind. (For a prime example of this see Faris 1973, 57).

In my own work I have tried consistently to avoid the worst of these pitfalls. The starting place for nearly all of my research has been a basic conviction that we must proceed knowing that the people we work with possess (among so many other things), an agency -- selfhood and all that it entails. Their agencies demand respect and honest direct dealings -- there is no need for coy or condescending behaviour or strategies to aid the project of finding things out from people; in fact the opposite approach generally has much better results. In short, people are perfectly capable of explaining and evaluating any number of things we might need help with. They are capable of fully participating in the research process, often more capable than the researchers themselves.

My fieldwork for this project involved going to different fishing communities, seeking out knowledgeable fishing men and women, generally by asking the people who lived there who would be good to talk with and then taking their advice. Generally this method provided numerous possibilities. When I arrived at people's doors, they were invariably willing to talk for a few moments with me about what I was doing and why I, a stranger, had just turned up wondering if I could interview them about their lives and work. It is remarkable how many were willing to have me in, to sit, sometimes for a number of hours, in their kitchens and ask them all sorts of detailed questions. People are tremendously generous and kind.

In some ways, my experiences were not remarkable. As I pointed out in the introduction, I was interested in topics -- their work and ways of life -- that many of the people with whom I talked still found as interesting as I did. It was clear that they cared deeply about these things, and, of course, were experts regarding

them. Also, people enjoyed remembering and bringing to life for me the complex and vital worlds and times in which they lived.

As a mainland, non-fishing Canadian, my research progress was much slower than that which would have been made by an outport Newfoundlander familiar with fishing. Nevertheless my status had a few benefits, one of which was that everything had to be explained to me. I took nothing for granted; a good approach for an ethnographer, and people were much more patient with me than they might have been with somebody "who should have known better." Unfortunately, I did not know better. For many weeks I was pretty much at sea; hardly knowing how to ask questions, never mind which ones to ask. This had its beneficial side though as well, for it forced me to begin with the most general kinds of questions and let people take over, to varying degrees, letting them suggest directions that our conversations might take.

In gathering these materials I worked hard "at conducting open-ended exploratory interviews," knowing full well that in a number of respects, I controlled those interviews and "the overall shape of [their] discourse" with my questions about a particular topic (Holtzberg-Call 1992, 10). I am aware of the inherent problematic effects that interviewing methodology can have on results, and I did my best to minimize these, using a number of techniques outlined in various fieldwork guides including Edward Ives's *The Tape Recorded Interview* (1980), David Taylor's *Documenting Marine Folklife* (1992), and Charles Briggs's *Learning How to Ask* (1987).

I used two approaches to interviewing. I began by employing open-ended questions in an effort to elicit what came first and foremost to people's minds

about certain subjects. As interviews progressed, or I returned a second time or third time to visit and talk, I frequently would employ more directed kinds of questions in order to follow up certain facts, issues and themes that had previously emerged (Lloyd and Mullen 1990, xii). Second, I took one piece of Charles Briggs's advice to heart and, tried to get to know the people and their materials well. In doing so, I learned what questions to ask and how to ask them. We must develop research approaches based on an understanding of what Briggs calls "indexical meanings," that is, meanings that can only be elicited and then comprehended by researchers who have some understanding of the contexts in which they are uttered (1987, 42; Clements 1980, 102). Only time and effort will enable a stranger to a place or culture to begin to understand any aspect of it, how people talk about it and in what terms -- in my case, how people cleaned, salted and dried fish.

On more than one occasion, I needed many attempts to get a question "right", so that the people I was talking with knew what I was asking about and could answer me fully in their terminologies, language, and images of the work. Often this exchange was enhanced simply by my use of an occupational term, but just as often I needed to have an understanding of more complex concepts than single words. My education in the processes of the salt fisheries lurched along haltingly, but slowly my understanding grew.

Many times I was humbled by my ignorance of the most basic concepts and practices of how work in the fishery was carried out. I had a lot of ground to cover, and that took time; the research for this thesis was carried out, off and on, over a period of nearly four years (though of that only a year and a half involved

concentrated fieldwork). It would be foolhardy of me to assert that even that length of time studying provided me with a profound understanding of, or grounding in, the work I was looking at, let alone Newfoundland culture as a whole. Although my research is only a start, I feel that it allows me to make certain kinds of observations and conclusions that I arrived at via the evidence of fishing men and women.

There are a number of issues and concerns that affected my fieldwork and the materials I was given by people. I cannot cover them all here, but I will touch on a number of the strengths and weaknesses of my study. In doing so I will also detail the geographical and thematic ranges of my research.

The fieldwork data for this project has been collected over the past four years. The main body was collected through the year of 1993 while working at the Newfoundland Museum as a researcher for an exhibit on the folklife and material culture of the Newfoundland salt fisheries. This work involved many intensive fieldwork trips with a particular emphasis on the inshore fishery, and it produced a sizeable collection of taped material, field notes, emic maps and photographs. I had a very broad mandate for exploring any number of aspects of life in the salt fishery (in relation to various artifacts of its world) and I took full advantage of the opportunity to cover many things including seasonal rounds, transhumance, the Banks and Labrador fisheries, weekly menus, divisions of labour, boat-building, catching and processing fish and the economics of different communities. This work has proven invaluable for coming to terms with the context within which the work of making salt fish went on, and it is perhaps due to this that I have become interested in how that work relates to its surrounding world

of activity, economy, and culture.

One of the weaknesses of this research year was the decided lack of work done with women. My colleague, Cynthia Boyd, and I were contracted to do the work. At the outset, it was decided with our supervisor, Walter Peddle, to divide the work along gender lines in order to maximize in a limited time our ability to develop rapport with the people with whom we worked, enabling us to elicit the fullest, most appropriate materials. As a result I did nearly all of my work with men.²

The lack of work with women was problematic in a number of ways, but especially with regard to my topic, because in most of the places I conducted my research, women were central to making fish (though men could and did often take part at various stages and at certain times of year). As a result, in the months leading up to writing the thesis, I undertook over a month's worth of fieldwork, in which I endeavoured to focus entirely on women who participated in the salt fishery, mainly in Bonavista. This work was challenging -- more difficult than I anticipated -- and opened my eyes to the many complex issues revolving around gender in fieldwork and research. It is worth describing a number of these here.

One of the main difficulties I had arose from the inescapable fact that I was a man, and slightly worse yet, an obviously middle-class, university-trained male researcher wanting to tape-record women about their lives. Any number of factors arising from my status affected my rapport with many of the women (and men)

²Interestingly, I spent a fair amount of time in interviews asking men about the role of women in fishing and related work. It was through this that I first became aware of just how important their activities were in all kinds of ways. Nearly to a man, men were remarkably forthcoming and straightforward regarding women's roles. This in itself was somewhat puzzling in relation to much academic writing on the salt fisheries, where women are frequently noticeably absent.

with whom I worked and work. Endeavouring to get past or to work in awareness of these inescapable markers and how they can and do affect rapport was my goal. Again, directness and honesty help. Perhaps the most appropriate way that I can explain some of these issues is to take some excerpts from a field report I wrote based on a month of trying to interview some of the older women who had been involved in the salt fishery in and around Bonavista. The report was written in relation to some traditional ecological knowledge research that I was doing at the time for a group at Memorial University. I wrote to one of them:

I am finding interviewing women harder than I supposed [not that big a surprise] -- mainly I think due to the old problem of them not being particularly comfortable being spokespeople and particularly not on tape. And when there are men -- husbands and the like -- around the whole thing gets compounded by the tradition of deferral to them, especially with me being a man, and everyone expecting me to want to talk with the men I suppose. As well, the elderli-ness of the salt fish generation is also a major factor -- they are very old now ... many are too old and tired to want to spend time on my strange and vaguely threatening academic foolishness. [One man I never got to meet, but had actually planned an interview with just passed away last Thursday.]

These passages speak for themselves. It can be difficult for a male researcher to find a context to talk with women, especially if there is a man available to answer questions. In many places in our culture, it is conventional and expected that men be turned to for their opinions or information, particularly if the context is a public one. I went on to comment:

When interviewing women I have found this whole problem intensifies when I begin asking specific detail kinds of questions verging on the conventional analytic/academic side of things -- e.g., why would they do such and such a thing to such and such a fish? And when they are uncertain about an answer, I think they feel all the more nervous about giving an answer that is not totally accurate or about appearing

unknowledgeable -- understandable given the perspective they as working women are coming from in this culture.

As I noted in chapter one, women's realms and women's knowledge have conventionally been, and continue to be, neglected and dismissed in academic spheres. It is my feeling that this neglect can often lead to uncertainty on women's parts in speaking about any number of things. I believe that they often feel that their knowledge is not important, that they have nothing of significance to contribute, especially when speaking to a man.³ Finally, in my rushed month in Bonavista, I did not have the time to build the rapport and trust necessary to sit and have a relaxed talk with many women with whom it would have been wonderful to talk. This was a hard but good lesson to learn.⁴

Nonetheless, I did have some wonderful talks with remarkable women and learned a great deal about their experiences and role in the work. In the end I managed to conduct ten formal (taped) interviews in which women were active participants.⁵ Five of these interviews were with women only; the other five involved wives and husbands. As well, on many other occasions I have had

³But this is also often the case for women researchers (Barbara Neis, personal communication, 1995). She noted that she too had had similar difficulties interviewing women. It is not necessarily just a case of being intimidated by men. It may be that women are uncomfortable with speculation and believe they have to have a complete and accurate answer. If they feel somewhat uncertain of their knowledge they may be less willing to share it. How much 'university researcher status' has to do with this is another question.

⁴It was hard for another reason besides not succeeding as well as I would have liked. It became very clear to me on this trip that the last generation of women (and men) who worked as adults in the salt fishery have all nearly passed on. Within ten or fifteen years the knowledge and memories of this remarkably complex and important industry -- the people, their communities and their myriad material and cultural traditions, ways of life that stretch back in some cases for centuries -- all of these things will be irrevocably gone.

⁵See appendix I for complete listings.

informal discussions with many women -- some I eventually ended up having taped sessions with, many others I did not.

Besides these main areas of focus, I conducted intensive fieldwork on Fogo Island on three separate occasions with my supervisor, Dr. Gerald Pocius (the first of which provided my initial introduction to the entire set of practices). We interviewed men and women and collected materials on the occupational folklife, material culture, and vernacular architecture of salt-fish processing. Making fish on Fogo Island presented some interesting contrasts (as well as similarities) to my work further south and east on the island of Newfoundland, and has proved very useful in sorting out the complexities of salt fish production. I also made a trip to Bonavista to collect oral-historical material on the old-time, inshore, trap fishery of that community for Dr. Robert Sweeny of the history department at Memorial University. This research focused on describing and understanding the socio-economic relations of production in that fishery -- relations among fishers and those between fishers and merchants -- work that initiated my interest and study of the area that I consider in the last sections of the thesis.

My research has not been all fieldwork. I spent a month in the summer of 1994 collecting archival materials and sources of data on making salt fish throughout Newfoundland. This has been combined with a wide variety of secondary readings on the fisheries and history of Newfoundland. These readings come from a range of perspectives, including analyses from folklore, economic, political and social histories, historical and cultural geography, and sociology and anthropology. I used accounts of a range of visitors and travellers -- from military men to ministers and from geologists to big game hunters. I have also read and

employed some of the insights gained from occupational autobiographies and life histories (for example, Butler 1975; Hussey 1981; Margaret 1980; Tizzard 1984) and from a number of important and very helpful student papers housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive.⁶ This documentary research has provided understandings of both spatial and historic dimensions of fishing cultures in Newfoundland.

As previously noted, the majority of my interviews were carried out in various communities on the Northeast Coast, and in Bonavista and Trinity Bays. These stretched from Fogo Island in the northeast, to Glovertown in Bonavista Bay, out onto the Bonavista Peninsula, with a major focus in the community of Bonavista. I also spent a good deal of time in a number of small communities on the south shore of Trinity Bay, running from New Chelsea to Sibleys Cove. I carried out a few interviews on the north shore of Conception Bay (or with people that resided there at one time), namely in Grates Cove and Port de Grave (see figure 2.1 for a map of the communities in which I did fieldwork).

This work from the east coast of the island forms the basis for most of the material contained in this thesis. In addition, I have carried out some research on the Southern Shore, a little more in Placentia Bay, and a fair chunk in the historic Banks fishing community of Grand Bank on the Burin Peninsula. This research, supports and helps to further ground my understandings of the work processes, but it is not my main focus.

Finally the breadth of my fieldwork, though useful in many ways, had some

⁶ A brief discussion of these papers and their use in the thesis can be found in chapter one (footnote sixteen).

drawbacks. By doing many interviews with different people in many, often distinct regions and communities, I sacrificed some of the benefits that go with concentrating one's research in a particular locale, to a group of individuals or a very directed topic. On the other hand I received a wonderful education in, and understanding of, the complexities of the Newfoundland salt fisheries. As I stated above, I feel that this education is critical given the complexity of the Newfoundland salt fisheries and the lack of previous research on my topic.

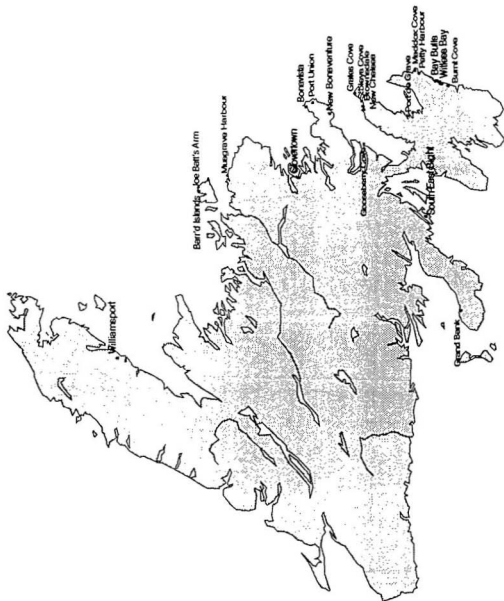
The above catalogue of my fieldwork serves a purpose beyond demonstrating that I conducted it. It is important to point out, as can be seen from the map of the communities in which I did fisheries research, that a number of communities from different geographic regions are represented. Many are out on the headlands and islands off the coast of Newfoundland, some are up at the heads of bays, some are inshore communities, and some were traditionally involved in the historic long distance and offshore schooner fisheries (the Banks and Labrador fisheries).⁷

These distinctions are important -- they frequently indicate very different

⁷I have been very lucky to work in many places in Newfoundland, with many people involved in a variety of pursuits and this has profoundly enhanced my understandings of the society as a whole. I have a great number of individuals and institutions to thank for these opportunities. Without their support and encouragement throughout this period, none of it would have taken place. Even more important, it must be said again that in every single community that I have worked, the people I worked with have been tremendously helpful in so many respects.

They have shared freely their knowledge, their lives, their food and lodgings, and endeavoured in so many ways to assist and encourage me in my studies. That assistance has been very real and very useful. Often on getting in touch with people (sometimes months after our initial visit) whether for research purposes or not, men and women whom I consider good friends have provided me with more detailed information regarding questions and issues we had previously discussed. They have clearly been doing their own research on these questions in my absence. People have mailed to me, of their own volition, tremendously important and useful research materials that they created for me, on their own time, simply out of interest and great kindness. I have been remarkably fortunate to have colleagues and friends such as they have been, and I can never thank them fully.

**Figure 2.1: Map of communities in eastern Newfoundland
where fieldwork was carried out
(Courtesy of Susan O'Brien).**



kinds of activities and fish-harvesting and processing methods and economic relations. For example, communities on headlands generally had richer fishing grounds. The explanation for this lies in the migratory patterns of cod fish. For the entire history of the Newfoundland fisheries, huge schools of cod struck in on the shores of the island in the pursuit of spawning caplin through June and early July.⁸ These fish hit the headlands and offer islands (offshore islands) first and in their greatest concentrations -- fewer fish tend to go up into the bays. This phenomenon has been observed for literally centuries (Head 1976, 20-4). The further up in bays one went, the less the effect of this caplin scull of fish was felt.⁹ People in the communities there often worked at other activities besides fishing or went to work in the offshore schooners and stationer or migratory fisheries.

Without this understanding of how different locales in Newfoundland affected the varying techniques used to process fish from area to area and whether or not fishing was the central activity carried out, my work here would very likely have been prone to partial or inadvertent reductionist explanations of the complex

⁸There have always been intermittent failures in the fisheries, years when either caplin or cod did not arrive. These often occurred in local areas or bays, but the occasional failure along an entire coast has been known. In 1933 [7x 317], at the height of the depression, there was one such failure on the entire Northeast Coast (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 85). Clarence Sparks, a fisherman from Sibleys Cove, Trinity Bay, recalled similar failures (including this same failure) in an interview I conducted with him (NFM-7/8). In Downing's early description of the fishery, he mentions the failure of caplin through a number of years and the effect on the earnings et al. (1676). Such failures occurred for various reasons, most of which were and are not entirely clear, but when they did, there usually followed, in turn, serious economic hardship for fishing families and merchants. The most recent collapse of Northern Cod, the cod stock of the Northeast Coast and Labrador, that led to a moratorium in 1992, is a failure on an entirely different, much larger and more tragic scale, and, in my view, resulted mainly from modern trawler over-fishing since the early 1960s, established, supported, and financed by various corporate and national interests.

⁹The caplin scull refers in this case to the cod fish that arrive chasing even more vast schools of the small pelagic fish, the caplin. These are one of the cod's main food sources (Story et al. 1990, 84). Until recently, they spawned prolifically on beaches around almost the entire island.

range of customary procedure that people used in making fish through space and time.

2.2 Fish-Making Contexts: Bonavista Fishing Rooms

Given the above contextual information, it is clear in many ways that the community of Bonavista was and is very well-suited for my study. It was until very recently a predominantly inshore fishing community with a long history of permanent settlement dating back to the mid to late 1600s. It is and has been larger than the average outport community for many generations. This has everything to do with its location down¹⁰ at the very tip of a major headland jutting out into the Northwest Atlantic. As noted, such locations were until very recently superb fishing places, and the waters around Bonavista have been known for excellent fishing for hundreds of years. The community is and was indeed a prime berth (Handcock 1989, 117-18; Head 1976, 11; Whiffen 1993, 11).

Though Bonavista has had access to tremendous amounts of fish, its

¹⁰The term "down" used in this case reflects local usage which in Newfoundland has two connotations. On the south side of Trinity Bay, the communities of Sibleys Cove and Brownsdale, near the "mouth" of Trinity Bay, where it opens out into the Atlantic are down the shore from New Chelsen. In nearly all the bays of the island, "down the shore" refers to locations further out to sea, that is out to the mouth of those bays. The other connotation of "down" is used to describe the direction of north, and thus, most places to the north of a particular location are "down" from it, as in "down north," or "down on the Labrador." These two senses might conceivably become confused from time to time in relation to bays oriented south, etc., but in most local usage and contexts they do not. It is usually only strangers, unfamiliar with the local geographical worldview, who are prey to such confusions (I am a prime example). The whole issue becomes even more cloudy when the concept of the bay "bottom" is introduced -- that area up in the bay, away from the mouth, that is, one would travel "up" to the "bottom" of the bay.

situation was less than perfect with regards to its harbour.¹¹ The down side of being located out on the headlands of the island of Newfoundland is that communities become particularly susceptible to remarkable Northwest Atlantic storms -- the raging winds and huge, punishing seas -- that prevail on its coasts.¹² These storms are more prevalent in late fall and through the winter and spring when stages and wharves were traditionally taken out and off of the water for safe-keeping. Such storms though can strike at any time of year. When big storms came in the later spring and summer, stages and wharves in the many unprotected coves in and around Bonavista (and elsewhere) were often smashed or lifted from their perches and cribbing on the water and washed away with all their contents.

The main harbour of the community, settled first by the mid 1600s, was

¹¹Early reference is made to the poor harbour at Bonavista with its "road very foul" in 1675.

"Road" in this case referring to mooring place of the community's waters, that is, its harbour (Hancock 1989, 118; Whiffen 1993, 16;).

¹²Until one has actually experienced such a storm, whether accompanied by rain, freezing rain, snow or sleet, it is very difficult to imagine. On one trip to Bonavista in early December, 1994, I was treated to two or three such storms that came, as they do on that stretch of coast, from the north, northeast and east, and can testify to their fury; they are literally awe-inspiring. And that is speaking from the perspective of a land-lubber. To be at sea in such a storm, as thousands have been down through the centuries, in all sorts of boats, could only be terrifying. There are many hundreds of accounts -- journalistic, literary and in song -- from over the centuries of sailors, fishermen, sealers, and their ships in distress or wrecked and the countless lives lost in these storms. The following provide a few examples: Chappell 1818, 210-14; Abbott 1987; Barbour 1932; Froude 1983 [1939], 101-06; Fizzard 1987, 153-56, 166-69; and Brown 1972. Abbott and Barbour both describe wrecks that resulted from the same storm in 1929. As well, there are countless songs and ballads that tell of sea disasters spread throughout the folksong collections of Newfoundland (e.g., Greenleaf et al. 1933; Lehr et al. 1985). I have also been told many stories of storms and wrecks in my own research. One of the most notable of these with reference to storms at sea is an interview with Leo Pope (NFM-40/41).

Many others have told me of the damage done to stages and wharves by huge seas. The economic and psychological costs were enormous and more than one observer has claimed that the very nature of the fishery in Newfoundland has played no little part in forming what has been called the fatalistic nature of fishing people here. For example, Devine 1990, 5-6; Froude 1983. The latter is the diary of a sailor, fisherman, and dealer of the Twillingate area in the years 1863-1939. His remarkable testimony of the trials, tribulations, and any number of fortunes made and lost generally involve the cruel sea (2, 124-5, 138, 169-76).

predictably the most protected spot along that coast.¹³ Between the 1750s and the 1820s, a lack of unalienated and unused shore space for fishing rooms¹⁴ in Bonavista's original harbour encouraged a growing population to spread from there into the many smaller, less protected coves and spots out around the entire Cape (Handcock 1989, 115-119).¹⁵ Many of these small coves and harbours (often allowing for only a few boats) were particularly vulnerable to northerly and northeasterly winds and seas (and easterly ones on the Trinity Bay side of the Cape), the directions that many of the worst storms come from. With all the fishing rooms taken in the main harbour, fishing families and their operations went down 'onto the Cape,' very probably first into Red Cove, given its nearness to the main community and the relative ease of constructing fishing rooms, and landing boats there. The local migration then continued on into every possible fishing spot out to the very tip of the Cape and around into Trinity Bay, onto what is known as Backside and Lance Cove. The coves, gulches, and small fishing places listed in figure 2.2 were still being used in the first half of this century.¹⁶

A good number of these rooms and the houses and gardens of their owners

¹³Year round habitation is thought to have begun by the middle of the 1600s, but the harbour had likely been used for many decades before that by seasonal migratory fishing crews from various nations (Whiffen 1993, 15-16).

¹⁴That is, the waterfront and adjacent land required by a planter family for their fishing operations: cleaning and salting stages, flakes, stores, and sheds.

¹⁵I found no data that indicates when this actually began occurring in Bonavista and its environs (though it very probably exists in one form or another), and so I rely here on Handcock's estimates for this region. Wilson Hayward asserted that his ascendants were fishing in Red Cove from the late 1700s (personal communication, 1993).

¹⁶The locations and family names associated with them noted on this map were mainly provided by Wilson Hayward.

were originally lived in on a year round basis, and indeed, remained permanent residences right up until the 1950s (for example, many of the homes in Lance Cove¹⁷). However, by the early 20th century the majority of fishing families with fishing rooms on the Cape took part in a very local migratory pattern. It consisted of living for the winter in a "winter house" in certain areas of the main community.¹⁸ These were considered the main dwellings, and were complete homes, with gardens, outbuildings, all of the furnishings, housewares, and linens required. For spring, summer and much of the fall they maintained a smaller, usually, rougher fishing house down on the Cape, also completely outfitted, and generally as close as possible to their fishing room. These summer places were within a few miles and often much shorter distances from their winter homes, the matter of a few minutes walk.

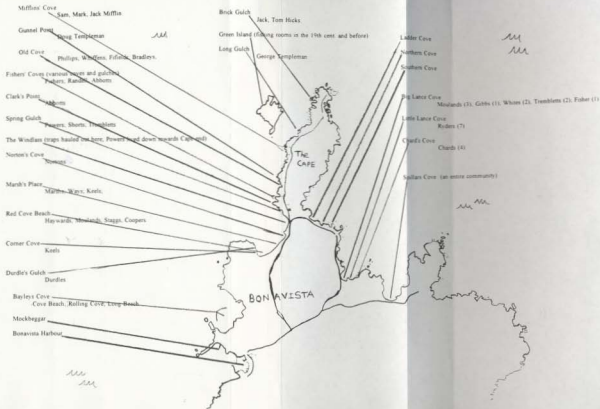
The proximity of these summer houses to the family fishing rooms, moored boats, and fish flakes was a necessity for the successful prosecution of the fishery. Families had to be close to their rooms to deal with the many threats that the sea and weather posed to boats, buildings, and drying fish. Women, who did most of the drying work on the land, could not be too far from their various responsibilities around the fishing rooms.¹⁹ Willie John Randell of Bonavista, whose family fished on the Cape near Fisher's Cove, explained this point:

¹⁷See for example MF-4/5.

¹⁸See MF-12/13; MF-14/15; MF-17/18; NFM-35/36/37; NFM-38/39.

¹⁹At different times many of these fishing rooms and their houses were year-round residences. For example, the Ryder families of Lance Cove lived year round there up to the 1950's. These very local migrations began in many Northeast Coast communities as early as the late 1700s (Hancock 1989, 118-19).

**Figure 2.2: Wilson Hayward's Map of Fishing Room Locations
in and around Bonavista (circa 1930-40s)
(and some of family names associated with them).**



You had to make your fish eh -- well you want to be as handy as that, as you could, for the women eh -- they only just could do their housework then they go out and put in half of the day or three parts of the day you know, at the fish, working at the fish ... so that is why you had to do it [move down onto Cape] ... that was all flakes down there and stages you know. (NFM-38/39)

Better fish-drying conditions were another benefit of the rooms down on the Cape. Willie John Randell noted that windier, often cooler conditions prevailed in these locations, so fish could be dried more quickly and with less risk (personal communication, 1995).²⁰

Depending on the amount of protection offered by a particular cove or harbour, differing levels of precaution were taken with regards to storms. Perhaps the main distinction between protected and unprotected harbours had to do with how the salting- and splitting-stage operations were organized. In communities on the headlands, in less protected fishing rooms, a second "salting stage" was constructed wholly on land in which the fish was salted and held while it cured in its salt. It was out of the reach of all but the highest seas. The communities of Bonavista, Sibleys Cove, and Brownsdale were all places with relatively unprotected harbours, open to storms and seas from a number of directions.

Despite the risks and the work involved in trying to avoid them, the fact that early settlement was eked out on these extremely difficult headlands makes it

²⁰Gerald Pocius describes a community called Stone Island at the mouth of Calvert Bay that developed during the 19th century because all available shore space at the head of the bay had been taken up. The fishing rooms on Stone Island were analogous to the rooms on the Bonavista Cape in other ways too; they were much more vulnerable to storms and high cliffs made moving fish from the water to the land very difficult. Interestingly, the opposite migration occurred there in the early 20th century -- during the fishing season crews moved from the island at the mouth to rented rooms up at the head of the bay. The benefits of the island -- close proximity to fishing grounds and better drying conditions -- were outweighed by the benefits of the less arduous and more protected rooms up in the bay (1991, 161-4).

clear that the fishing was profitable enough to make the risks worth it.

Figure 2.3 is a map drawn from the memory of Wilson Hayward, a trap fisherman, who fished right up into the 1950s with his parents, siblings, and wife, May, in Red Cove, an active summer community of fishing rooms right next to Bonavista (see figure 2.2). This map depicts only one stretch of the entire cove: other rooms with their stages, flakes, stores, and houses continued on in both directions. By the 1920s, Red Cove's rooms were inhabited only during fishing season, running from approximately May to October. Figure 2.4 is a photograph of the stretch of Red Cove beach that is depicted on the map. The building just up and to the right of the centre of the photo is the store that belonged to Chesley Hayward and his sons, Wilson and Bob (store #13 on the map, figure 2.3). The house seen to the right belonged to Charles Hayward (house #6 on the map), and the house to the left does not appear on the map. As can be seen, very little evidence of any kind remains of the once bustling cove. To the left of the store, near the beach, a retaining wall supports the bank that the salting stages were built on. The road along the bank can be seen running off towards the right. The picture was taken from the area of Red Cove between Red Cove beach and Corner Cove, the place that the Keels fished from (see figure 2.2).

Each room consisted of four basic elements, as you moved from the water in: Splitting stages were out on the water near to the stage heads which were joined to the land by long bridges. Next came the salting stages -- in on the bank above the high water mark -- where cleaned and split fish was brought for salting. In further were the fish flakes, the high wooden platforms on which fish were dried in the wind and sun. Fish stores were frequently attached to these flakes at their

Figure 2.3: Map of Fishing Rooms at Red Cove Beach (circa 1940s).

Key:

Sp St: Splitting stage

Sl St: Salting stage

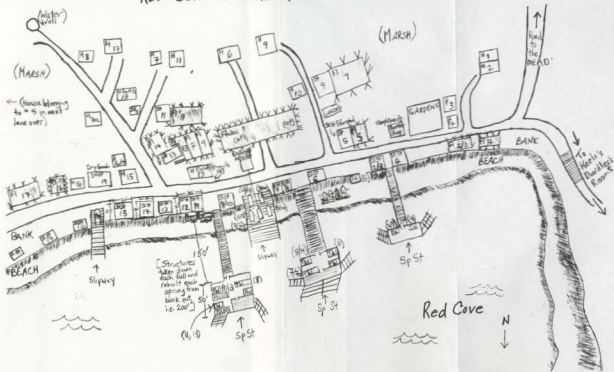
Fl: Fish flake

St: Fish and gear store

H: House

# for Owners' Name (#) Crewed with	Owner's Name
1	Joseph Moulard
2 (3)	William Moulard
3 (2)	James Moulard
4	Jack Moulard?
5	Philip Durdle
6	Charles Hayward
7 and 7a	Thomas (f) and William Hayward (s)
8 (14)	Joseph Hayward
9	Samuel Hayward
10	Albert George Hayward
11 (12)	Fred Hayward Sr.
12 (11)	George Hayward
13 (15)	Chesley Hayward
14 (8)	Alfred Hayward (shareman with Joe Hayward, #8)
15 (13)	Albert John Stagg (shareman with Chesley. Hayward, #13)
16	Tobias Cooper
17	Fred Hayward Jr.
18	John Stagg
19	Joseph Stagg

RED COVE FISHING ROOMS






Figure 2.4: Red Cove Beach, Bonavista 1994
(photo taken from the vicinity of Comer Cove)



second floor so dried fish could easily and quickly be carried in (for example, in the case of rain). Fish was also stored in them before being shipped for sale to the merchants. Generally, behind all of these structures came the summer fishing houses. This layout minimized the distances required for lugging heavy fish, work mainly done by hand until the 1950s, though the odd operation used horses.

By the 1920s, there was very little space left, either on the water or back in on the land, for expansion of more operations. In fact, at this point in its history, landing places for unloading fish were completely taken up and different crews (often related by blood and/or marriage) were sharing these crucial spaces. In one case, one stage head and splitting stage contained the splitting tables of at least three separate crews (NFM-35/36/37). (See figure 2.3). This was very much the norm around the Cape. In almost every little cove, stage heads and splitting stages were shared between a number of crews, and often even salting stages were also shared by separate operations (MF-4/5; MF-6/7; Doug Whiffen, personal communication, 1995).

Stage heads and splitting stages were built varying distances out over the water and this distance depended on the sea's depth which had to be great enough to allow a fully loaded boat to come in and unload. Wilson estimated that their stage head was 200 feet out from the high water mark, back up on the bank. The stage head and splitting stage were joined to the land by a 150 foot bridge. The entire 200 feet was dismantled every fall and rebuilt every spring, as noted above, in order to avoid destruction by the high seas and storms, and the crushing sea ice of the winter months.

The map is not drawn to scale, though some estimated dimensions have

been added to provide some idea of the sizes of some of the structures. The only critical distinction that must be made is between the type of fish harvesting different crews carried out. A number of the rooms on this stretch of beach fished with cod traps, a large, relatively expensive, but very successful fishing gear.²¹ At the height of the fishing season a cod trap could catch twenty thousands pounds of fish or more a day. The salting stages of trapping operations had to be able to handle extremely large amounts of fish. In Bonavista where they pickled fish in puncheons (large barrels) and other barrels, a trapping operation's salting stage could hold up to forty or fifty puncheons (NFM-38/39; NFM-35/36/37).²²

The other fishing techniques that predominated in Bonavista were the hook-and-line fisheries.²³ These were more modest operations and the volumes of fish they would handle would be much less than that of a trap operation. Willie John Randell recalled his father's hook-and-line stage holding between twelve and fifteen butts (a puncheon with the top quarter or so sawed off) (NFM-38/39).

For the map of Red Cove Beach above I have emulated as much as possible

²¹See chapter one for a brief description (footnote 10) and chapter five for a slightly longer one.

²²If every one of forty puncheons were full, then conceivably the stage could hold approximately one hundred quintals at the one time (a very unlikely circumstance) -- though not all caught and processed at the one time of course. This converts roughly to 40,000 lb. of round fish.

²³These operations used baited hooks on two kinds of line to catch fish. The most basic and longest standing was the hand-line and is self-explanatory. The other, known as the trawl or bultow, was introduced to Newfoundland in the mid-19th century. The trawl is a long line generally of about 50 fathoms in length. Along this line, usually at one fathom intervals, short (3-foot approximately) lines called "suds" were attached. On each sud was a baited hook. There were two basic types: the ground trawl that sat directly on the bottom and fished, and the floating trawl which could be sunk to different depths to fish away. Trawl had distinct advantages over the hand-line fisheries. It fished continually, and in conditions that hand-line crews could not. With its many hooks it could potentially catch more fish, more quickly. On the down side, trawls were more labour intensive, requiring a great deal of day-to-day maintenance.

Wilson's original rough sketches and orientations and in this sense, this is a copy of an emic map; nevertheless, the responsibility for any errors of the layout or details is mine.²⁴ Wilson asserted that there were actually many more flakes than he drew on his map. Those depicted give a rough idea of where the main body of them were.

These brief sketches and illustrations of the layouts and organization of fishing rooms in Bonavista provide a basic sense of how fish left the boat and moved from the water onto the land, and through their processing. The next three chapters explore in micro-detail the various phases of that processing for different kinds of salt fish, though they focus mainly on the class made in Bonavista known as pickled. I will follow fish from its unloading at the stage head, to its cleaning and salting and then to its washing and drying. It must be kept in mind that this work and these communities had been sustained for hundreds of years by this summer's fishery work -- as communities were all along the coasts of the entire island. Since at least the 1500s, fishing people -- first the migratory fishing crews of various nations; then the West Country English and Irish men and women -- had all toiled in similar (technologically speaking) inshore, small-boat fisheries. It was this shore fishery that was famed right up to the 1950s for producing the lightest salted, highest quality fish for export to southern European and Caribbean markets.

Many of these people had worked in boats and stages and on flakes very

²⁴The only convention I have not followed is to attempt to represent the buildings in three dimensions. Of note in Wilson's depiction is his placement of the land at the top of the page and the water at the bottom of the page. My own geographic assumption was to invert this orientation to fit the directional conventions of published maps, that is, with north being "up." At this spot in Red Cove the water lies more or less to the north.

much like the ones that I have been describing and will continue to describe throughout this thesis. The sense of continuity over these centuries is, at times, staggering.²⁵ The work patterns and techniques and the ways of life were all traditional in the truest and deepest senses of the word. Generations of fishing people lived their lives and laboured at remarkable toils through hundreds upon hundreds of seasons, and at each turning a renewed set of tasks -- moving with those seasons between summer and winter quarters, intimately tied to the those seasonal rhythms, tied most of all to the summer striking in of millions upon millions of codfish and the work of catching and then curing them.

In this chapter I have tried to furnish the reader with a sense of the fieldwork (and its methodology) that ground the findings of my research throughout this thesis. I have explored some its strengths and weaknesses and argued that a primary strength in the case of my topic, was its breadth. I visited and worked with people in a range of communities along the east and south coasts of the Island. This work introduced me to the complex nature, modes, and structures of the various salt fisheries of Newfoundland. The knowledge gained from those researches has in the end equipped me with fuller understandings of how the light-pickled inshore fishery fits into the structure of those salt fisheries. This in turn provided me with important data with which to improve my research questions on this particular branch of the salt fisheries and its products. As a result, my entire analysis of that fishery (the basic case study for this thesis) benefitted, as did my overall understanding of Newfoundland's salt fisheries.

²⁵Compare in the next three chapters the words and descriptions of people who fished through the first half of this century with those of John Downing, a Newfoundland planter of the mid-17th century, excerpted in appendix 2.

In short, my fieldwork approach provided me with knowledge that allowed me to focus on key aspects of technique and product in the light-pickled fishery. In the second part of this chapter I have examined a number of these in relation to the processing contexts of the light-pickled, headland, inshore fishery, using Bonavista as an example. These descriptions, illustrations, and maps of the salt-fish work context have provided the reader with frames of reference that will prove useful for the next two chapters. In these I proceed with close descriptions of my case study: the occupational folklife of making pickled fish. Chapter three begins that analysis by looking at the first two phases of the processing: cleaning and salting.

Chapter 3. Cleaning and Salting Fish

In this chapter I begin the detailed exploration of the main focus of this thesis, the processing of salt cod in the inshore fishery. Making fish involved three phases: i) cleaning and splitting, ii) salting, and iii) the washing and drying of the fish. Below I will consider the first two phases. As well, I will devote a section of this chapter to describing the work involved in landing fish onto stages, a laborious preliminary to cleaning. It will become clear from the main sources of my information -- the memories and words of the women and men who carried out the work -- and from my summations and paraphrasing of their words that this work and its processes were complex, requiring tremendously hard work, an intricate and extensive body of traditional knowledge, and techniques learned from childhood onward. I will try to evoke via the vivid descriptions that they provided and through a number of secondary sources, some sense of their work and their world. The main goal of this chapter is to flesh out the skeleton that represents our knowledge of the everyday practices of the salt fishery which was the dominant realm of work and life in Newfoundland prior to 1950.

Interwoven into the important description of micro-processes and techniques, I will draw attention to important ideas, themes, and evaluations that emerged from the conversation of the people with whom I worked. Throughout the busy summer production months it is clear that fish-catching, processing, and selling were definitely the top priority in people's daily lives. Salt-fish processing was in many ways all-engrossing of people's bodies and souls. Melita Guy who grew up on Cape Bonavista commented that besides taking care of fish, people had many other responsibilities:

[they] only had time to do the bare necessities.... sometimes you wouldn't be able to have dinner cooked ... if they get work done they cook something for supper see? They had to work and play it by ear, you know, 'cause if you got a lot of fish you couldn't leave it. It would spoil anyway in these hot days -- it had to be done and salted. (MF-17/18)

Children looked after younger siblings, and many helped out with various sorts of work. Everyone's focus was fish. The work filled their conversations, and it filled their days with long hours of labour. At certain points in its processing, fish had to be treated with the utmost care, literally babied, and at all times it demanded continual attention and assessment to ensure that the cleaning and drying turned out successfully so that well made, high quality fish was the result. "Split right, done right, washed right, cleaned right and then you got it" as Heber John Keel succinctly put it (MF-2/3).

Throughout this chapter I hope to evoke as fully as I can a sense of what that workaday world of processing and making salt fish was like. I want to capture the sheer, often brutal toil of the "caplin scull" -- the long hours, days and nights spent on the water, in the stages and on the flakes; to capture and describe as best I can in print, the feel, the look, and the sounds of the salt fishery.¹ To create such images, I will rely on the same oral and historical documentary materials, as well as historical and contemporary photographs. In many interviews people highlighted, with rueful comments and narratives, the sheer back-breaking quality of the work that the catching and processing of fish required. Some

¹The caplin scull was the busiest fishing period of the year, defined by the arrival of vast schools of caplin that came inshore to spawn in June (later in the month, the further north one went). Along with them came as vast schools of feeding cod. The scull lasted anywhere from eight to ten weeks -- the tasks associated with it, ten to twelve, depending on the year and location. This was also the time of the season when cod traps were generally used and extremely productive.

questioned whether the incredible efforts and labour expended, the skills and the knowledge that were all brought to the work were finally worth bringing (not that they had much choice in most cases). Given the toll that was exacted and that, for the most part, real earnings were so scanty and the process by which they were distributed so suspect (in their views), such questions are entirely justified.

Producing quality, light-salted fish was very labour-intensive work. It demanded that each individual fish be handled many times over as it went fresh from the water to its finished state, ready for shipping to the merchant for culling (grading) and sale. Mr. Willie John Randell, a trap fisherman from Bonavista, captured very nicely the prodigious quality of the work as well as providing a neat summary of all the phases involved, including cleaning, salting and drying:

That's what you had to do with fish then. And you had to work at it then I'll tell you. There's a lot of work to it eh. You had to handle one fish then -- one fish from the time you take him out of a trap berth, or take him in your boat, I allow you had to handle him -- you had to handle him I suppose pretty well fifty times before you sell him eh!

'Cause you had to take him out of the trap, then you had to put him in your boat, then you had to bring him in and take him out of your boat, then we used to have what we call "blocks and tackles" eh, then you have to lift down what we used to call "tubs," full them up, then you have to pull them up about 15 or 20 feet; then you come in on a landing place, eh ... well we used to come in on this landing place, then we had to take it and we used to pew it up with a pew on deck. Then you had to put it in your stage ... when you got it in your stage -- well you had to put it under salt -- you had to take it up, put it on your table. Then you had to cut it, head it, then you had to split it, then you had to wash it. Then you had to turn around and put it into butts ... then you had to salt it, then you give it three days and four days in there, then you take it and wash it out, then you had to take it and carry it maybe you know, hundred, couple hundred feet eh in tubs. Then you had to take it up on your flake. Then you had to spread it all out, one at a time. And then we'll say ... well what we used to do then -- we'd

turn it over in the night [first day of waterhorse]²... you know a good night when you wouldn't look for no weather, then you go back in the morning, you turn it back again. Then we'll say you kept it out after ... 3 or 4 days, then you put it in what they called- well I'll call it piles eh, little piles. Then that would press out, sort of press out, you know what I mean. Then you had to spread it again, take it up again, spread it again, take it up again then you put it in a big round pile, sometimes he'd be 5 feet in diameter. You know you put so much for what we used to call "work it."

It'd stay there then you know for a couple days "season" -- get salt all in through like eh, so ... and then you had to make it see and dry it through -- you had to make that fish till it dried through eh ...

So then ... we'll say ... then you take it to the merchants eh, take it to the stores, then you sell it. And then you'd be clear of it. Well that was a lot of times to handle one fish eh. (NFM-38/39)

Given the number of fish caught in a season, the handling of each one fifty times speaks to the incredible labour involved in processing light-salted fish. I turn now to a detailed description of the steps required to make an inshore sub-class of light-salted fish called pickled fish by the people I worked with in the community of Bonavista and many other places in Trinity and Conception Bays. In the first phase of cleaning and splitting, however, the methods and techniques applied universally to all types of salt fish, from light to heavy. In the salting phase, of course, there were clear distinctions.³ Pickled fish was the lightest salted of all the salt-fish classes and, as a result, it demanded the most skill and attention

²"Waterhorse" is a term used to denote fish in the first few days following its removal from salt and its washing out.

³Given this, in describing the cleaning phase, I will employ descriptions from various locations where various styles of salting were used. In the salting section I will concentrate on the pickled method, though even here, certain principles applied between the different classes and styles of fish, and so the odd comparison will be made here too (though with caution).

to detail (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 48-9).

As stated earlier, no matter what kind of salting was practised, once a load of fish was landed, processing it involved three basic phases. This work took place in splitting stages (or cleaning areas in stages where salting also went on) like those depicted in chapter one (figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.7). Cleaning a fish entailed laying it on a "splitting" table, cutting its throat and then cutting part of the way down its belly. The fish was then gutted, its liver being reserved for oil, and then its head was removed. Next, it was split down its backbone right to the tail and the majority of the "sound-bone" (so named after the "sound" or swimming bladder attached to it) was cut out and discarded. Usually, the fish was then washed in salt water before being "laid away" for salting in a container, usually a barrel of some kind.

Salting the split fish required the orderly laying away of that fish. The fish were spread open on their backs and the exposed flesh of each fish was salted. They were left in salt for varying lengths of time, depending on the amount of salt used and the type of cure hoped for or required. Pickled fish was so-called because it was literally pickled in watertight containers in a solution of salt and the water drawn by that salt from the fish's own flesh. The containers in this century usually were recycled molasses puncheons, and salt meat or flour barrels. The salt drew the water out of the fish's flesh and they combined to form a pickle. As the fish cured it floated in this brine.

After the fish had remained in salt for a prescribed period of time, during which a good deal of water was drawn from its flesh, it was taken from its containers, carefully washed free of salt and any remaining dirt or blood, and then

usually left to sit and drain for a few hours or overnight. Finally the fish was taken outdoors to be dried in the sun and wind, on flakes or beaches.⁴ During these first (and in all) steps of processing fish, workers were constantly aware of the need for careful and attentive work.

Precise work ensured that the maximum weight of split fish was yielded from round fish. Precise work also ensured that a good-looking, quality fish was produced. This was of great importance since grading and thus the final price received was based largely on the appearance of individual fish. So, in these first steps, the men and women of fishing operations strove to unload, cut, gut, head, split, and salt correctly and carefully in order to produce as close approximations as possible of an ideal fish for eventual sale.

I turn now to the detailed evocation of these steps, looking first at the difficult and, at times, dangerous landing of fish.

3.1 Landing Fish

In the Bonavista inshore fishery, in the era from the 1920s to the 1950s, fish was brought to shore in small wooden boats varying from just under twenty to just over thirty feet in length. Fishermen fished in all kinds of wind and weather and boats came to unload at fish stages in a variety of sea conditions. Landing fish (and setting out to catch it) was often very tricky and even dangerous work:

We had to come in and take her [their boat] -- "Now watch out boys, for

⁴Most beaches in Newfoundland are covered in beach rocks (tennis to slightly larger than softball shaped rocks) rather than sand and as such generally make good places for drying fish.

the sea."⁵ Haul off from the stage again, watch out, go in again, heave up so much more [fish] on the stage head. Had to watch, with your hands into a rode [mooring rope] this way [gestures astern] "Haul off again boy! Pull it out so far again." ... Otherwise you'd be swamped right to the stage, smashed up to the stage. (MF-2/3)

Figure 3.1, a photograph taken at Mifflin's Cove on Cape Bonavista, illustrates nicely the concept of a sea.

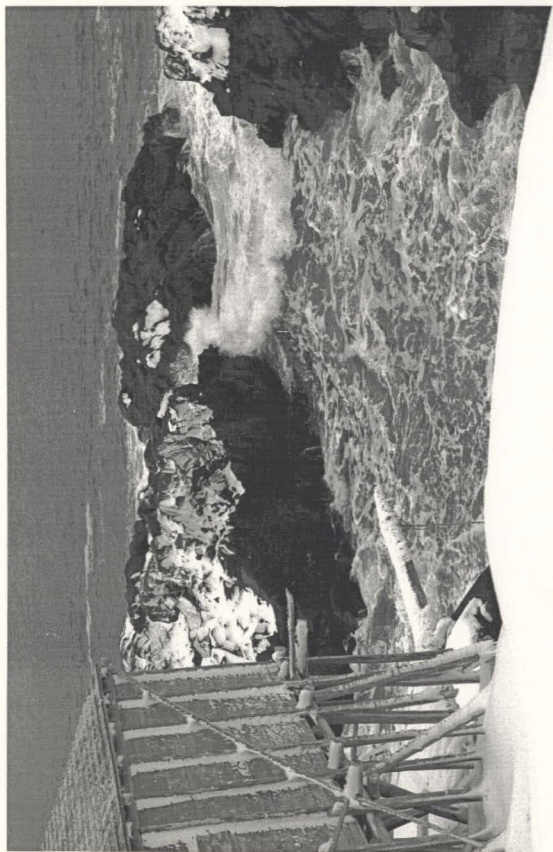
Places for landing fish, that is, the place at which the boat in the water unloaded up onto the stage, were determined by many factors. The depth of water was the first consideration, for a fully loaded punt or skiff had to be able to get in to unload at low tide. At Heber John Keel's family stage in Red Cove, in low tide conditions, only a punt could land fish, and even that was tricky (MF-2/3).⁶ The Keels were required to laboriously transfer the fish from the skiff, moored further out, to the punt which was then taken in to finally land the fish ashore. How the sea behaved in any particular spot also affected whether or not it was a suitable landing place. The landing place had to be accessible in heavier sea conditions, and had to have some shelter from various wind directions. I have stood on the Cape with a fisherman, looking at what seemed two equally worthy, side-by-side locations, and was told that one was used and the other not, due to the way that waves and eddies broke and behaved in these seemingly similar spots.

⁵The term "sen" here refers to a wave or swell. A widespread belief in Newfoundland regarding such big sens, (and one frequently proven empirically in many people's views) was that after three successive large waves, a brief moment of relative calm would follow. I have come across this idea in texts and in interviews (Abbott 1987; NFM-40/41).

⁶A punt along with the rodney are generic names for wooden boats at the shorter end of the range of inshore fishing boats. The punt ran from approximately eighteen to twenty feet in length and the rodney was often a little shorter (from fourteen to eighteen feet). In cod trap operations, both punts and rodneys were used in conjunction with larger trap skiffs to help haul the traps and carry fish. They generally did not have engines and were towed behind the skiffs which did (See Taylor 1982).



Figure 3.1: A "sea" coming into Mifflin's Cove, Cape Bonavista.



Again, the contours of the sea floor, the depths of the water, and nearby formations all had their effects (Fred Tremblett, personal communication, 1994).

As might be expected, all kinds of local solutions to the environmental problems of landing fish were worked out. One method that fishermen in Bonavista and on the lower shore of Trinity South used to protect boats during rough seas (and while unloading them) was to literally hoist the boat out of the water with blocks and tackles suspended from the stage head. The boats were left hanging ten or twelve feet above the water while they were being unloaded or overnight if the weather was not civil (MF-19). Sometimes, boats were hauled up slipways just beyond the reach of the sea, beside stages and unloaded from there. This required the construction of various entrances into the stages. Different doors were used in different wind and sea conditions.

Fishing rooms on Backside and in Lance Cove (on the Trinity Bay side of the Bonavista Cape) were difficult to fish from due to their eastern and northeastern exposure. Winds from this direction drove huge seas onto this shore regularly, frequently requiring that boats be hauled up or moored in safer harbours on the Bonavista side of the Cape. The launching, landing and unloading of boats loaded with fish in all such places called for remarkable judgement and boat-handling skills. Many people have related to me the considerable skills required to launch and unload boats in rough sea conditions. This was especially difficult before the advent of engines (circa 1910) and remained difficult with hard-to-manoeuvre one-cylinder "make-and-break" engines that predominated in the inshore fishery into the 1950s.

Laura Whiffen of Bonavista described her father's willingness to brave very

rough conditions, which, in one case, led inadvertently to the serious injury of one of his daughters:

Now Pap used to go out in seas -- he didn't mind the seas, he'd stay out -- when he'd be out on the water he'd stay out -- and Mam'd be watching for Pap, be the last one come in and there'd be seas in the gulch and they'd be frightened to death, Mam would -- Mam had to go and get a crowd then -- the women to haul up Pap see? ... WOMEN would come down ... used to haul them up -- and some men too would be there.

So uh, now this day, Pap was waiting for the sea to go back -- that's what they used to do -- wait for the sea to go back -- to get out. Well Pap went out before the sea went back see? And there was seas in the gulch and poor⁷ Lizzy was up on the flake -- and Mom -- carrying out fish, carrying across fish and there was longers on the flake, see longers, you know, those big round longers ... so they'd move, you know, if you wouldn't watch it, and poor Lizzy was looking at Pap going out in the sea and Mam was looking at Pap, and she fell down through the flake.

Well she didn't break her [unclear word] the doctor said, but she worse than broke, worse than broke. She never got out no more for over a year. (MF-14/15)

To move fish from the boat up into the part of the stage where it was cleaned and split generally involved a great deal of forking and hauling. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 provide an indication of the heights involved.⁸ These were not

⁷The term "poor" here indicates that the person being described is deceased.

⁸Figure 3.2 is an historic photo of a fishing stage at Old Cove belonging to Dan and Herb Whiffen. Figure 3.3 is a long shot of the same stage pictured in figure 3.1 at Mifflin's Cove. Both coves are listed on the map of the Cape in chapter two (figure 2.2). Figure 3.1 was taken in the early 1940s at low tide which partly explains the height. Generally though splitting stages needed to be built a good vertical distance above the water over which they rested in order to be safe from the combination of high tides and big seas. This was particularly the case in headland fisheries where fishing rooms were often stuck out in the remarkably ferocious Northwest Atlantic. In fact, the rocks that can be seen lining the edges of the "bridge" out to the stage head were likely placed there as ballast to help hold the structure in place in the case of high seas, a common practice in less protected coves down at the mouths of bays all around Newfoundland.

**Figure 3.2: Herb and Dan Whiffen's splitting stage, Old Cove,
Cape Bonavista (circa 1940s)
(Photo Courtesy Mr. Wilson Whiffen).**



Figure 3.3: Flake, stage and ``T," Mifflin's Cove, Cape Bonavista.



unusual vertical distances over which to lift fish. People employed a variety of methods for getting fish up out of boats. The most simple involved using a one-prong pitch fork known as a pew, to prong one or more fish at a time through the head in order to swing them up onto the stage head area.⁹

Depending on the height involved from boat to stage head, a variety of solutions besides the pew were devised for getting fish into the stage. Mr. Randell describes below the initial movement of fish onto the land. This involved hauling fish in tubs up onto his family's "T," using block and tackle. Later in the same interview he describes his family's splitting and salting stage, a building thirty feet above the water, with a structure they called a "T" at an intermediate level (probably akin to the one pictured in Figure 3.3):

That's the stage there [pointing to diagram] ... the landing is there, the first landing, then the stage'd be up there, we used to have it -- but some people you know would have it on the one level ... we used to have it on two levels.... we used to call that a "T" down there eh, what you call a "T" ... like a platform.... so that's what you had to do, you had to take that out of your boat then, put it in those tubs, block it up there then we used to have a pew -- that's a fork -- for to take it up, well two at a time or three at a time or one at a time you know, you put it up in this stage up here ... split it and salt it up there ... the puncheons ... [for salting] were in there ... that was up 30 feet from the water.

Oh, you had to haul water up there too, yeah. You had to draw up your water in a bucket too, two gallons or three gallons or four ... no more than four and no less than two and a half. You had to lie down your bucket, then you had to pull it up and then you had to pass it up to another fellow ... from the "T".... you have a bucket eh, with a rope on it ... just haul it up.

Sometimes now, sometimes we'd draw it up in a tight tub eh [puncheon],

⁹The fish was pronged through the head in order to not damage or puncture its flesh. To do so would reduce its value as a final product. Pews could have very long handles depending on the height that fish had to be raised from boat to stage head.

you put en down ... you get probably 3 or 4 buckets eh. You pull them up with the tub ... hand that water up [to the stage]... about 8 feet, round 7 or 8 feet ... there was another ladder there to get up. (NFM-38/39)

Fish was not the only item that was regularly hauled up over this initial height. Seawater, an item constantly required at various stages in salt-fish processing, was also pulled up more or less continually from below, whether in the laborious method described above, or through a hole in the splitting stage floor (where the stage was directly over the water).¹⁰ This method was common on the stage heads of Newfoundland, where vertical distances ruled out the use of pews. In Figure 3.2, the structure from which the blocks and tackle were hung can be seen on the bridge at the stage head. Generally, two timbers, the width of a "shallop's tub" apart, were nailed onto the outside of the rails that formed the ladder of the stage head.¹¹ These timbers served as guides for the tubs as they were being raised and lowered. The timbers were often greased with oil from cod livers (rendering out in barrels usually nearby the stage) to make hauling easier (Doug Whiffen, personal communication, 1994).¹²

¹⁰It should be noted that many stages were built over the water, and that the kinds of physical layouts represented by Mr. Randell's stage occurred in situations either where the better spots for fishing rooms had already been alienated, or where fishing rooms were particularly susceptible to the storms. Of course, with the better spots taken, people had to resort to less amenable locales for constructing rooms.

¹¹A shallop's tub was, in this era, usually a sawn-off 200-pound flour or salt-meat barrel with rope handles and approximately a quarter sawn off its top. They were put to many uses, though most frequently they were used to carry fish of various types, including bait and cod at different stages of processing. Generally it was a barrel carried by men, as working with them was deemed work too heavy for women who, when they carried fish *et al.*, used instead the half-barrel tub, the same barrel sawn in half.

¹²This greasing and lubricating of surfaces to make hauling and shifting fish easier was not limited to the stage head. A number of other examples are described below.

3.2 Cleaning and Splitting Fish

Once the fish was unloaded from the boat, it was carried from the stage head to the area where it would be cleaned. This area was usually known as the splitting (or outer or lower) stage. In the case of Bonavista, where structures built on the water were vulnerable to the ocean, the splitting stage was generally a very small rough building, out over the water, as near to the stage head as possible. It was usually only a short distance from the stage head to the splitting stage. This saved unnecessary hauling of extra weight (forty per cent of the weight of a round fish being lost in the gutting and splitting process). The building was used strictly to clean fish, that is to head, gut, split and initially wash fish. After cleaning, the fish would be taken in onto the land to the salting stage, above the high-water mark. The splitting stage along with the bridges and walkways leading out to it were taken down at the end of each fishing season and reconstructed the following spring in places where conditions warranted it.¹³ In many locations the distance from the splitting stage to the salting area could easily be well over 100 feet (see figure 3.4 of the flake-bridge leading to Dan Greene's stage in Tilting on Fogo Island).¹⁴

Various means were devised for carrying fish from the stage head to the

¹³Winter storms and ice would most certainly have swept them down. Indeed, often enough, spring, summer and fall storms were capable of doing this. See chapter two.

¹⁴In fact, depending on the depths of water, and how fast the sea bottom dropped as it left the shoreline, these bridges could extend literally a few hundred feet out into the sea, running from rock to shoal. Such bridges exist at Joe Bat's Arm on Fogo Island owing to the shallow waters of its harbour. Many other locations have little to no need of such elaborate bridges. Dan Greene's flake bridge and stage did not need to be taken down each fall as the section of the harbour he is located in was well protected. They only took up the stage head (where boats tied up to unload) for the winter (see figure 1.3, 1.4, and 3.2 for depictions of stage heads).

**Figure 3.4: Bridge leading to Dan Greene's stage,
Tilting, Fogo Island.**



splitting stage and from the splitting stage to the salting stage and then onto the flake. The two most commonly used in Bonavista were known respectively as gully sticks and handle-bar tubs. The gully stick was a long and strong stick which was run through the rope handles of a shallop's tub (or a half-barrel tub if women or boys or girls were doing the carrying). The carriers at either end would place the stick on their shoulders and walk the load to its destinations. This was very heavy work, and could be brutal depending on the distances and the climbs involved.

The other carrying device, the handle-bar tub, as a number of people in Bonavista called it, is perhaps better known as a "hand tub." It had two long sticks or poles for handles which two people grasped at opposite ends for carrying. At the mid-point of the sticks (and between them) a half-barrel tub was attached. The device was constructed along the same lines as the hand bar or barrow, but was more useful for carrying wet, slippery, and floppy items such as fresh fish or green fish just out of salt. As noted, hand tubs were more often used by women and younger people for the tub used was generally smaller than the shallop's tub.¹⁵

When fish was brought into the cleaning area of a stage, it was usually put in a holding container of one sort or another, within reach of the first member of the cleaning crew, the cut-throat. Laura Whiffen, who fished at Old Cove in a stage just beyond the one pictured in Figure 3.2, called this container a "pen." This container sat near the splitting table, filled with fish, awaiting the first stage of processing. In some places on the Northeast Coast this was called a fish vate or vat (Miller 1979, 3; Story *et al.* 1990, 594).

¹⁵Though I have seen hand tubs that used shallop's tubs.

In the cleaning areas, fish were also often just laid in on the floor, though precautions were usually taken to see that fish could not fall out of the stage as in figure 3.5 of Leslie Coles's stage in Deep Bay on Fogo Island. Note the lips where the floor meets the opening onto the water and the one running up the inside of the door frame. Planks could be laid against these, one on top of the other, to hold in large piles of fish. This same technique of containing fish was mentioned by Bride Fitzgerald of Spillar's Cove as having been used in her father's stage (MF-6/7). A table tender, often a junior member of the crew or a child, would keep the supply of fish flowing to the cut-throat or cutter, the first person in the processing line.

The centre of activity in the cleaning area was a large wooden table, nailed at one end to a wall of the stage. This was called a splitting table, the surface upon which most of the cleaning took place (see figures 1.7 and 3.6).¹⁶ The cut-throat and the header stood on the seaward side of the table (that is, the direction from which the fish were coming). Across from them stood the splitter (or splitters, if a large load of fish was being processed and more than one was available).

Having never participated in cleaning and splitting fish and having only observed it on a few occasions, it would be slightly presumptuous of me to attempt to describe it in my own words. Rather, there exist some very well-written and detailed descriptions in a number of sources as well as some equally excellent oral

¹⁶This table in Dan Greene's stage in Tilting on Fogo Island (figure 3.6) is being cleaned after the cleaning and splitting of some fall fish by yet one more of the innumerable buckets of sea water used in fish processing. Sea water was also poured onto the table during the processing as well to help lubricate the surface for the passing of fish from station to station (Budgell 1979, 2). See also figure 3.9.

**Figure 3.5: Door opening out to stage head of Leslie Coles's stage,
Deep Bay, Fogo Island.**



**Figure 3.6: Washing down the splitting table
(extra splitting cleat at lower right),
Dan Greene's Stage, Tilting, Fogo Island.**



descriptions provided by the people with whom I have spoken. Two of the best written accounts I have found are in papers by Brian Miller and Catherine Warren, housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (both 1979). They detail cleaning fish in various locations, including a number in Trinity Bay. As with all work processes, subtle variations of technique existed between different crews and people, and I will draw attention to certain important features of each task that Miller, Warren, and the people I worked with outlined.

Step one is the cutting of the fish. To do this the "cutter" holds the fish with his left hand, with his fore-finger in its right eye and his thumb under its "chin." The fish is held on the splitting table ... with its abdomen facing the cutter ... It is important that the knife enter the fish in the middle and that it be cut right down to the navel, leaving no pocket at the end. If it is not cut through the navel it makes the splitter's job more difficult. (Miller 1979, 7)

Warren elaborates:

The cut-throat ... used a stubby knife to cut the fish's throat ... He would ... push the jaw back and gills would flap out would run his blade from left to right from one gill to the other. Then the cut-throat would start in the middle of the cut (also between the fin bones). The blade was placed upwards and it continued being pushed down. The cut was to the left side of the navel and its length continued until about three inches beyond the navel. The fish guts were ... shown after the cut-throat's job. (Warren 1979, 27-8)

Miller goes on to describe heading as follows:

After being cut the fish goes to the "header" who takes out its gut and takes off its head. He holds the fish open, with his left hand takes out the liver first. Then he grasps the intestines of the fish, near the navel area, and in one movement takes out all of the inner organs. He then takes the head off the fish. To do this he holds the fish firmly in his left hand with his three middle fingers between the "vins"; flaps that once made the upper abdomen.

Now with the fish's neck on the edge of the splitting table the "header" takes the head in his right hand; his thumb in its right eye and his fingers on its "chin." With the fish held in such a way a quick push exerted by both hands forces the head from the body, the table edge acting as a lever and cutting edge [Figure 3.7].¹⁷ The head and gut of the fish are dropped through a hole in the stage floor at the header's feet, the liver is dropped in a bucket. (1979, 7)

With regard to heading, many fishing crews actually constructed their splitting tables with a very thin-wedged or a "feather" edge (or even attached a thin sheet of metal) where the heading was to take place (NFM-30). This was done to facilitate the job as related in the following comment from Wilson Hayward:

Usually the women would be cutting it and gutting it you know, taking the head off and gutting it, pushing it on along cut the throat and ... just cut it down, the cutter would -- he wouldn't take the knife out of his hand see. Cut the throat, cut it down and then he push it along to the one that was heading it. So they'd take the liver out ... throw it into a container and then take the gut out and take the fish and put it across the table [the table edge] -- we used to have the table cut right out right thin -- put the head down under the table and push the thing along -- my sonny, we had women could gut fish, you know. (NFM-35/36/37)

Though cutting and heading were seemingly straightforward jobs, both required "a knack," and if done poorly could affect the quality of the fish, though this was more the case with heading. A poor cutter could puncture the guts of the fish, and waste materials could get onto flesh of the fish (Butt 1979, 10). Miller notes that if the cutter did not make the cut down the abdomen the correct length, the splitter's job would be more difficult. Bennett March, a trap fisherman from Brownsdale, made this same point, describing the knack of a good cut-throat and

¹⁷ The sound of a codfish being headed is memorable, especially for someone unacquainted with it. I would describe it as a combination of loud crunching, tearing and gugging noises.

Figure 3.7: Heading fish, Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island.



then neatly summing up the nature of the skill, care, and training that went into being a "good hand" at any one of the cleaning steps, despite how seemingly basic some of the jobs appeared.

MF: Was there any trick to being a good cut-throat?

BM: Yes there was. To make it easy for the header -- there was the right place to enter the knife, after you cut its throat, where you wouldn't cut the liver in two or rip the gut open -- and that was practice. And even though the fish be gluttoned and bloated right up you could take that knife and turn around and be talking to somebody -- you'd enter it and go down and you wouldn't leave a thing -- you'd open the fish -- the liver would be all intact, the puddock¹⁸ of the fish would be there ... not cut.

And when you'd be cutting it for splitting, when you get down to what they used to call the pisser of the fish ok? On the side that the knife went down to split you always- never left a pocket there, you should always give the knife a flick that way- so that the splitter when he come down he'd follow it on down through ... a pocket would make it hard for the splitter. He'd have to- that'd be an extra cut for him when it come to him. The first thing he'd have to do would be to go down there and give that a flick and then start splitting ...¹⁹

it was all individual jobs that required practice to be good at -- not that hard to learn, but just practice ... there was ways to do it right and ways to do it wrong.... But you couldn't just- you'd look at a fellow doing it -- you just didn't come and take it and do it right -- even the cutting of it. It didn't look like much but even the cutting the fish down good -- there was more to it than it looked -- it took practice. (NFM-30)

¹⁸The stomach.

¹⁹As an aside, it is clear that describing these work techniques on the page makes for poor translation to say the least. Unfortunately, it was not much better in person, when described at a kitchen table with hand gestures and scrawled diagrams. I point this out only to drive home the point that, as with many other work techniques, the written or spoken work generally fails to convey the actual form or meaning of the technique. The only place, unfortunately, that such techniques can be successfully transmitted is usually very much in the actual doing of the work, in this case around the splitting table, cutting, gutting, heading, and splitting fish. For discussions of this issue, see Dormer's comments on craft knowledge (1994, 10-12) and McCarl's (Byington 1978, 4-8).

Wilson Hayward confirmed that one of the key techniques that defined good cut-throating was this taking of the cut down past the navel with the knife, saving the splitter extra effort and time, both critical issues given the large quantities of fish that had to be put away. He noted also that there was more than one way to cut throats, that one man he recalled cut up from the navel rather than down to it. This recollection led to the following comment: "But everybody had their own style, you know, in doing things you know -- but it all amounted to the same thing" (NFM-35/36/37). He also recalled that some of the best cut-throats were women. Freeman Randell of Williamsport on the Northern Peninsula recalled that his father insisted that his wife cut throats whenever he was splitting because of her careful attention to detail and technique (personal communication, 1995).

Regarding the heading of fish, Wilson Hayward noted that there were right and wrong ways to go about it:

And some people when they headed, we'll say was not used to it, they'd break the fin bones, you know the bones of the fins? And then you get a bad cull with that ... you have to cut it right, and head it right and split it right, for a good product, you know. (NFM-35/36/37)

Miller also mentions this issue of the breaking of the fin (or "vin") bones while heading and the effect of this on the quality and the eventual price of the fish (1979, 12). In figure 3.8 the area circled, up by the nape of the fish, displays this flaw. As well, the header had to be careful to get all of the fish's liver off of the nape area, in order to avoid leaving a liver stain that would lower the value of the fish. Butt comments that, in heading, if any of the fish's skull remained, then poor splitting would ensue (1979, 11). The cutter and header had to be extra careful when cleaning large fish. Heber John Keel of Bonavista (along with a number of

**Figure 3.8: Three salt fish displaying various flaws: ragged broken ``vins"; sound-bone cut too high (centre fish); liver on lower right vin of centre fish; round-tail (bottom fish).
(Photo courtesy of Brian Miller and the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive).**



others) spoke of "jowling" large fish, that is, cutting a particular bone at a place which made heading these fish possible.

Heading was physically demanding work and the women and men who headed large loads of fish stood, often for hours, tearing off fish-head after fish-head. In some stages various seating arrangements were devised to provide some rest as well as a brace that the header could use to get leverage for the "quick push" described above.

Brian Miller pointed out that before the fish was gutted the liver was removed, placed in a bucket and reserved for cod-oil making, which was made either on the premises or sold to merchants with liver factories (Miller 1979,7). Many splitting tables had "liver holes" with buckets below them to catch the livers as they fell through, though this was typified as "old-fashioned" by one commentator from Twillingate (Bulgin 1978, 71).

Mary Ann Martin recalled that as children, she and her siblings sometimes had the job of scraping liver off the table and into a barrel, a job that clearly was not relished:

MAM: ... and we'd take the liver what they was taking out of the fish and put down the barrel by the table ... but if you didn't do that right you wouldn't be long there [laughs].

MF: How would you have to do that ...

MAM: You know, just take the liver and scrape down with your hands and then if you went and washed your hands then a few times [pause] you wouldn't be long doing that -- you'd have to dry your hands and go on ... yeah. (MF-1)

The single most important job in the cleaning process, and the step that

required the most skill was splitting. Heber John Keel stated simply: "Splitter was the main man, sir, splitter was the main man in the fish, splitting the fish" (MF-2/3).

The task involved laying the fish open down its sound (or back) bone to the tail, and then cutting out a good section of that bone. The job required accuracy and speed, and at various sub-steps of the splitting, certain errors could easily be made. Miller describes it as follows:

Once the head and gut has been removed the fish is ready to be "split," this is probably the most time consuming and intricate job of the lot. The splitter holds the fish by the "vin" with his left hand, against a small stick nailed to the table [see figure 3.6, bottom right]. The stick²⁰ helps to keep the fish in place as the necessary cutting is done. He enters the splitting knife, on the side of the sound bone furthest away from him, at the point where the head came from the body. From here a cut is made, at the depth of the bone, right back to the tail, slicing the fish so that it lies open flat all the way. Then the fish is held by the sound-bone and the bone is cut at about the middle and the tip of the knife is moved back up the fish [See figure 3.9] and the bone is removed completely. The fish then drops into a puncheon tub of water, right below the splitter's hands where it is washed before salting. These three things [cutting, heading, splitting] are all done on the splitting table and, needless to say, much faster than it seems from the reading. (1979, 8)

In splitting, a number of effects were looked for: first, it was important not to waste any fish. Wilson Hayward noted that during splitting, in the rising of the bone, a good deal of meat could come off with it, affecting the weight and the look (NFM-35/36/37). Good splitters were expected to have a yield of approximately 60 lb. of split fish from 100 lb. of round fish. It could be very

²⁰Also known as a cleat, e.g., Bulgin 1978, 74-5, who also notes that the cleat blocked fish that were being slid across the table from interfering with the splitting.

Figure 3.9: Splitting fish, Dan Greene's stage, Tilt'ng, Fogo Island.



costly to a fishing operation if the splitter was achieving even a marginally lower yield throughout a season in which many thousands of pounds were processed. In his paper on making fish, Brian Miller alludes to both issues *vis-à-vis* good splitting technique (1979, 13). It was also very important for the fish to have the proper look. The fish had to be laid open right to the tail. Those who turned the knife too soon left the last inch or two of fish-tail closed. This was known as a round-tail.²¹ It, too, was considered lower quality and fetched a lower price. Heber John Keel pointed out that there may have been a practical justification for this (beyond the cosmetic), in that fish not opened to the tail might not be exposed to enough salt, or the drying of sun and wind. The negative effects of this would, of course, vary with the length of tail that was left unsplit, and the size of the fish (MF-2/3).

Willie John Randell described round-tail and another common splitting problem; if the place where the sound bone was actually severed was too far up towards the head, then a large blood stain might result:

... you go down clear of where the blood was at. Now some people split fish and every one of them you could put your finger in that -- where they, what we call "rise the bone" eh, for to take the bone out there's a place you've got to put your knife in and separate en eh and cut en out. Now some people we'll say you could -- where they rise that bone, take the bone out, put your finger in ... big as that, big as the top of your finger ... that would be a big spot of black blood. Now, some people wouldn't bother to get it out, more people would wash it out. But what I always split ... when I'd rise the bone eh ... you wouldn't know where he come out by the blood or nothing, 'cause I put him in the right place see. There's a certain place to split so you ... have to have the bone what they call "rose" in the right place, and then you had to lay him down through the tail, and you had to put in ... you had to put him off sort of like- like on a angle, you know ...

²¹The bottom fish in figure 3.8 is a round-tail though this is just visible on the edge of the frame.

coming down like that eh and go off on a angle like that [gesturing]. You know you couldn't cut them off just any way -- they'd be round tails ... and that'd be -- well that'd be salt bulk, they'd even give you cullage for that one ... you had to have it split right eh. (NFM-38/39)

Lloyd Bulgin observed that in Twillingate, crews with less skilful splitters who left blood spots, either where the sound was severed or at the nape, would take the time to cut off these blood spots just before shipping the fish (1978, 76).

Another important feature of a well-split fish was the way the cut of the sound bone was made: "If the splitter did his job well, the end where he made the first incision to sever the bone from the rest of the fish represented a figure-eight. Many splitters used to boast of their 'eightful skill' " (Bulgin 1978, 74). This was echoed by a number of people, including Heber John Keel:

Everybody can't split good fish. You had to split to the tail, right down to the tail, then take the bone out ... father used to say when he'd look at it, you know, the figure-eight he used to call it, right here where the bone was cut [gestures], see, just like an eight ... oh yeah, he'd say he was a good cutter, a good splitter eh, when he cut out t' e bone. (MF-2/3)

Interestingly, in an excerpt on splitting from an English fisheries manual of the mid-19th century (reprinted in an appendix in Perley 1852) the following instructions are given:

The fish should then have the bone removed, care being taken that it shall be cut away to within twenty or twenty two joints of the tail, not directly across, but by the splitter pointing the knife towards the tail, and cutting the bone through two joints at once, in a sloping direction, so as to leave the appearance of a figure-eight. This looks best, and it has this advantage, that the fish are not mangled, as they are apt to be when the bone is cut square through one joint. A slight incision should be also made along all the adhering part of the bone, to allow any remaining blood to escape, and the

splitter should then drop his fish into clean water. (277)

Figure 3.10 displays a pile of cut-out sound bones and a splitting knife from Dan Greene's stage, Tilting, Fogo Island.

Another key to successful cleaning and splitting was the use of very sharp knives (Bulgin 1978, 75; Butt 1979, 11; Miller 1979, 12). Dull cutting and splitting knives made for jagged cuts which left a rough texture on the flesh of finished product and lowered value (Bulgin 1978, 75). So as the cleaning work went on, men and women, especially splitters, would often stop to sharpen their knives.²² Wilson Hayward stated:

Oh, you sharpen the knife every few minutes you know oh yes -- you have a piece of dagger ... scythe dagger where you sharpen the scythe, you used to buy them one time, about that long [indicates length] -- or you have a nice bank rock -- where you get up in the bank -- not a beach rock, but a bank rock, a white one, you have he on the table -- you sharpen your knife, you know. Especially if you had to wait for fish you know -- that's what you'd be doing -- sharpening your knife, you know. Had everything good see?

Sometimes you'd be ahead you know, more times ... all depends, if you'd be getting small fish ... they'd [cutthroat and header] gang up on you.
(NFM-35/36/37)

In figure 1.7, the cleaning knives can be seen in a rack above the splitting table along with a sharpening steel. Clearly the technical demands of splitting were

²²It is interesting to note that splitting was almost exclusively a right-handed occupation. The blades of splitting knives were designed for splitting with the right hand, and the splitting path on the fish at the tail always curved over to the right (as one faces a split fish with its nape uppermost; see figure 3.8). I was told of one or two left-handed splitters, but they seem to have been extremely rare. The relatively unusual look of left-handed fish in an industry where look was so important, likely had much to do with this.

**Figure 3.10: Sound-bones and splitting knife, Dan Greene's stage,
Tilting, Fogo Island.**



numerous and any number of things could go wrong with this work: the loss of fish meat, round-tails, poor placement of cuts resulting in blood spots and an uneven surface, and dull knives all had to be guarded against. As well, some of these transformed into aesthetic norms that splitters tried to achieve, as with the figure-eight cut. When the need for quickness is added to all of these, it becomes clear that good splitting was a demanding and dextrous task.

The closing remarks of Wilson Hayward's description above allude to this other key concern that figured in splitting, and applied to cleaning fish in general: speed. To be able to split fish quickly was a very important skill and highly regarded. Good splitters had to be fast and a well-known and widespread illustration expresses very well just how fast:

There have been many stories told of the skill and proficiency of some of the Twillingate fish splitters. Some of these are partly true while others are far from the truth. It has been reported though, there was once a splitter in Twillingate who kept a bone in the air continuously while he was splitting.... Keeping a bone in the air all the time meant that as the proceeding bone is dropping toward the water below, the next one is on its way through the opening in the side of the stage.²³ Similarly, there have been stories told of extremely slow splitters. It seems that one fellow was such a slow splitter that in one particular instance when he started splitting the fish it was a tomcod, and when he had finally removed the bone it was extra large. A tomcod is a fish under twelve inches in length and an extra large is a fish in excess of twenty-one inches. (Bulgin 1978, 76-78)²⁴

²³See figure 1.7 for this opening.

²⁴The latter part of Bulgin's description clearly represents a humorous and wild exaggeration; he also noted that similar exaggerations existed for feats of speed at splitting. Instead of one bone in the air, such and such a splitter kept two, three, four or more bones in the air at a time. Such stories, known by many different names the world over, are called "cuffers" in some places in Newfoundland (Faris 1973, 148-49; Devine 1937, 17).

Many people, mostly men, told me of people they knew who were capable of this basic feat:²⁵

I had an uncle ... my uncle, Sam Fisher, he lived to 103. And uh, they say- Father said he could take out a bone, and while the bone was pitching in the water, he could have the next one cut out ... that's how fast he could take them -- you know, he was a fast splitter eh? (MF-2/3)

Mr. Keel remembered his uncle splitting quickly simply for the sake of seeing how fast he could do it, and many others remember either doing the same, or being present in stages when such displays occurred.

People were capable of splitting at a remarkable rate when they had a full cleaning crew to support them, which was the case when large hauls of fish were brought in. Often a second splitter would be called upon. This role was sometimes filled by a member of the crew itself but just as often they recruited from another crew in the community (work for which they would receive recompense, usually in the form of fish).²⁶ Wilson Hayward recalled splitting between three and four quintals of trap fish per hour when their crew was working at full speed -- approximately 1200 to 1400 pounds of fresh fish (NFM-35/36/37). William Wells of Change Islands, born in 1892, split fish from the age of seventeen, and his average rate was three quintals an hour (Budgell 1979, 1).

²⁵Performance of certain kinds of materials are often aligned along gender lines. Various plausible explanations have been put forward to explain these distinctions in relation to various genres of narrative (e.g., Small 1979, 108-10). I did not ever hear this particular item regarding splitting prowess either from or about a woman. In this case part of an explanation might be slightly simpler: women splitters were not very common after the 1930s, so while people remembered excellent women splitters, there may not have been so many memories of seeing them in action (MF-1; Russell 1971, 23).

²⁶Joan Russell's great-grandmother Russell of Plate Cove on the Bonavista Peninsula was a "renowned" splitter whose skill "would be called upon even by fishermen 'on the other side of the harbour' if they came in with a heavy catch" (Russell 1971, 23).

Bulgin makes the following estimate: "it has been generally accepted that a fast splitter can keep a continuous flow of fish dropping from the splitting table and into a tub below, and not take any more than four or five seconds removing the bone" (1978, 78).

This preoccupation with speed and those splitters that could maintain these sorts of rates was based in a very practical principle of processing salt fish as the following comments from an interview with Heber John Keel show:

When there was a lot of fish on, oh yes, you had two -- two would be splitting it, you had to -- try to get rid of it, I mean, especially in the hot July days, the quicker you put it in pickle the better....

You come in perhaps with a boatload or two boatloads of codfish.... That had to be put away -- especially in the summer -- so quick as ever you could put it under salt -- otherwise you're gonna have, like I said, bad fish. It had to be good-- the harder it is with pickled fish -- the better it is. Or salt bulk fish same thing. See once it gets soft on you, like I said, when it's falling away from the bone, you cannot do it ... you know. You can't do it. The sun is getting at it? You can't -- no way ... the quicker you can get it under salt, the better. You got hard, nice, hard fish. Well when you got *good hard fish, salted right it's gonna come out right*. Otherwise you're not gonna have much of a fish. (MF-2/3)

But the weight and quality of the splitting could not be sacrificed as Bulgin points out: "There is a big difference between a good splitter and a fast splitter ... A father's advice to his son or any other beginning splitter used to be to learn how to split well and learn how to split fast afterwards" (1979, 78-9).

Catching and cleaning fish at the height of the season was tremendously busy and hard work. Catches were often big, especially during the trapping season when traps were being hauled twice a day, and large amounts of fish had to be processed. The splitters and the rest of the crew worked incredibly long hours as

Wilson Hayward's memory of their trapping schedule indicates:

We'd get out around 6:00 o'clock ... get up around 5:00 you know ... and get our breakfast, and we'd get aboard our boat and we'd go out ... we'd haul our traps and that, come back again, we used to be splitting fish then all day, in the evening we'd get clear around 3:00 o'clock, and we'd go on again -- come in then with another load, tie up to the stage and that, hoist it up in the stage -- we'd be at it all night then till -- we might get a couple hours rest -- you know -- GO ON AGAIN -- right steady at it. (NFM-35/36/37)

Once fish was split, it fell into a tub of water at the splitter's feet (see figure 1.7). As he split he would give the fish in the tub an odd slosh around with his rubber boot to help wash off any blood or slime though some purposely did not wash fish before salting (Budgell 1979, 4-5). This water would be changed every so often and the tub of split fish carried up to the salting area, which in Bonavista was generally a salting stage, above the high tide mark. Heber John Keel recalled this steady movement of fish and how two or more tubs were in constant use; after a full tub was left with the salter, an empty one would be placed down between the handle bars, and carried back to splitting table to be filled anew (MF-2/3). Following the cleaning and splitting of fish came the task of salting.

3.3 Salting

Laura Whiffen: The *salter*, the *salter* was *the one* to do the fish ... if you didn't have a good salter, you wouldn't have ... good fish. (MF-14/15)

Clarence Butt: Yeah, well this [salting] probably is one of the most important steps to be considered in salting cod fish and, my father, I know he salted cod fish all his life and he was very particular with the quantity of salt he give it and how he spread the salt on it. (Butt 1979, 12)

The work of the salter was crucial to the final quality of salt fish. Both men and women were salters, but in the first third of this century in Bonavista, it seemed to

be mainly the specialty of women, especially in smaller hook and line operations. Bride Fitzgerald stated: "Yes ... Sarah used to salt all her fish -- yes and me Mother, my aunts and they, they all salt their fish ... yes, boy, no men used to salt fish then" (MF-6/7). Gender aside, wherever fish was made around the island, salters played a key role in producing good quality fish (Bulgin 1978, 83-4). Too much salt would make the fish prone to salt burn and cause it to easily break apart later on in the drying phase. Too little salt and the fish would turn sour or go slimy after the salt was washed out. This was especially true if the weather did not co-operate and the waterhorse fish had to wait a number of days before being spread. Bulgin points out that "there have been many instances where fishermen have had to 'prong their fish over the flake,' a term which meant to throw the spoiled fish away" when it went bad or got "snatchy" because of any combination of overly light salting and bad weather. Such fish was called "mung dungo" in Twillingate according to Bulgin (1978, 85).

Salting was a complex set of techniques that required taking account of numerous variables, for example, fish size and thickness, weather conditions, temperature and so forth. As with the cleaning of fish, speed was of the essence: the faster that fish got under salt the better. As noted, there were many kinds of salting from heavy to light. Below I will describe initially the salting of the pickled fish, the type prevalent in Bonavista through to the 1950s. This type was perhaps the lightest salted fish of all and required a number of peculiar techniques and steps that differ from the dry salting that was done in bulks.

The split washed fish carried from the splitting table arrived in a half barrel tub to the salting stage or store. This transporting of split fish to the salting stage

was just as heavy work as the lugging of round fish to the splitting table, but here distances and climbs were, in places like Bonavista, potentially much greater. The trip from the splitting area to the salting stage was sometimes facilitated by the greasing of surfaces over which the tubs *et al.*, might be hauled. Willie John Randell described how some trap crews hauled fish in tubs on a small sleigh affair with greased runners:

Yeah, you'd have a little rope bridle in it see and you could- a couple fellows towing three tubs a time instead of bringing one eh ... with this one you take three eh, and bring them the one time and you do it quicker and not take so many trips you know.... you put a bit of old oil, what we called old oil ... on that ... they used to render out the [cod] liver too, see, in the barrels eh. Well you put a- get a bit of that and put on or a bit of liver what come out of the fish eh, just to grease it up see, but sometimes you had a job to stand up... but you could spread- you could leave that in the middle, leave one fellow to get over there and the other fellow get over here eh, and you wouldn't walk on that you know like ...

that'd be for trapmen, when you have a lot of fish, you could do it a lot quicker see? (NFM-38/39)

Generally, the table tender and sometimes the salter would help lug fish up to the salting stage. Children were also enlisted in this task, as was anyone at the splitting table who had a spare moment, though the splitter and header (who could also cut throats while the cutter was hauling) would stay at their more skilled work. There was a steady movement of round fish in from the boat, into the stage, around the splitting table, and finally ending up, split, in the salting stage. The heads, guts, and sound bones were fired out through the holes in the floor and wall by the splitter, to either rot for a while on the rocks below or get washed away by

the sea (see figure 1.7 for a depiction of both holes).²⁷

The salter and those helping her or him had two basic steps. First the fish had to be carefully laid open with its flesh up in orderly tiers in the puncheons, butts, puncheon tubs, and/or the barrels that were being used.²⁸ Fish in puncheons and barrels were generally laid in a radial pattern, with their tails toward the centre of the barrel (MF-14/15).

As each tier was laid away, the salter would salt it and the next tier would be put in place, either by the salter or a helper. Laura Whiffen, who helped her mother-in-law do this in the salting stage of their fishing room, described the freshly washed and split fish, laid away in its container: "I liked to be looking at them 'cause they'd be so clean, and so white ... beautiful ... beautiful ..." (MF-

²⁷That is unless the heads were going to be saved for human and/or pig consumption. "Fish's faces" were often eaten, fresh or pickled. Guts were also frequently used in gardens as compost, particularly for cabbage. Between the fish offal rotting beneath all the stages during low tides, caplin and offal rotting in gardens and in composts, and cod liver rendering out in barrels in the hot sun, a busy salt-fishing community was capable of producing some distinctive aromas.

²⁸Puncheons are very large watertight barrels used generally for shipping molasses. They could be up to approximately five feet in height (Crewe 1981, 26) and could hold anywhere from 44-140 gallons (Story et al. 1990, 395-6) though in the era in question, ninety gallons was an approximate average size (NFM-34). A butt in Bonavista terminology is a puncheon sawed off at about the 3/4 mark or slightly higher (Wilson Hayward, personal communication, 1992). Willie John Randell said that about ten inches is taken off a puncheon to make a butt (NFM-338/39). This shortened puncheon has a wider opening and both modifications made salting easier, especially for women. Even with butts, women still often required some kind of a stand in order to reach down into these large barrels and puncheons (MF-6/7).

Puncheon tubs were half puncheons and were used for many purposes, especially for washing fish at various points in the processing, but also for salting fish in (Crewe 1981, 26-7). Every spring all of these containers had to be made ready for salting as Wilson Hayward describes below:

you'd get her plimmed up, you know, if it be ... dried up ... once you put your hoops on and drive it on tight you know, you fill it up full of water, then the water would be coming out of it ... but after a couple days it would soak and the wood would expand ... ready then ... for all the summer. (NFM-35/36/37)

14/15). In some operations the salter would give the fish a further washing and in such cases, the fish was then left to drain a while before being salted (MF-1).

Salting, at the most superficial level, involved throwing handfuls of salt on fish, but there was much more to it than that. Each and every fish required salt and the amount used depended upon the fish's size and thickness and its placement in the container (bottom, middle, or top); as well, different parts of a fish received more or less salt. Considering how quickly salting went, an experienced salter made many decisions from instant to instant, assessing each fish from various standpoints, and then cast, usually by hand, more or less salt depending on the fish's condition. After a certain amount of training and experience, such assessment and technique became on one level, almost unconscious or second nature, as the following discussion with Laura and Doug Whiffen demonstrates:

LW: She [Laura's mother-in-law] taught us how to salt, how much to salt, you know, you put the salt-

DW: [interrupts] The way you take the salt in hand, like that [gestures; both Doug and Laura speak at same time] ...

LW: She had the salt in here and she had a bucket [DW: ... they could salt fish you know] You'd be quick salting fish too, you know. She used to put -- on the big ones -- she'd put more on the big ones than you would on the small ones.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

MF: Ok I see, and the medium eh.

DW: You had to know what-

LW: You had to know what to put on eh.

MF: And what about certain parts of the fish -- did they get more or less

than other parts?

LW: Well [DW: Right, yeah] yes. Thick parts, thick parts get more.

DW: You mostly put your salt on the thick part of the fish eh. [LW: Yeah, yeah] ... you didn't want any ... [unclear, covered by Mrs. Whiffen's words below] on the thin, on the thin -- the pickle took care of that-

LW: You didn't want none on the fins -- wouldn't go on the fins -- now, if it was -- now if it was a big- if twas great big fish, you'd throw a little bit like that [gestures the way one would cast salt over fish], I'd see Mother throw a little bit like that. And it twas great big fish in the butt eh...

MF: Ok, hunh, and you just got the feel for it eh, you knew how much to sort of throw on-

LW: Yeah, she knew how much to put on. I used to look at her -- I used to lay them away for her. (MF-14/15)

The gesture that Mrs. Whiffen made to show how her mother-in-law salted was a key moment in the above discussion and in many respects central to the whole description. Her hand quickly moving, tossing imaginary salt over an imaginary tier of fish encapsulated exactly how an expert salter actually salted. Salting cannot be easily understood or learned through hearing or reading this description of it (or by observing Mrs. Whiffen's imitations of it in her kitchen, for that matter). One aspect that became immediately apparent from the gesture was its quickness, the rapidity with which the casting motions were made, indicating how quickly and how instinctively (or by a feel) that the work was done. Mrs. Whiffen said the following when I drew attention to this "fast motion of dropping the salt": "Yeah right, yeah. You had to be a quick salter, didn't you ... keep the fish going you know" (MF-14/15).

This again highlights the importance of speed to the whole cleaning and salting processes. Getting fish in under salt as fast as possible was critical. Like Heber John Keel, Laura and Doug Whiffen drew attention to the need for quick processing, from the moment the fish were caught to the moment it got into the pickle puncheon.

Various rules or tricks applied to salting pickled fish; for example, big fish were often put aside for laying away at the bottoms of puncheons, butts and barrels (MF-14/15) and less salt was generally used on these bottom layers, as it was commonly known that the stronger concentrations of salt settled at the bottom of the container (Butt 1979, 12-13; Frost 1979, 19; MF-14/15; Miller 1979, 8-9; Story et al. 1990, 395). The following comments from Heber John Keel sum it up nicely:

Now with your pickle, it's only just so much [salt], and as you come up -- your bigger fish you try to get down the bottom you see ... because the bigger fish take more pickle you see, in longer- well you know- the top wouldn't take as much you see? What you do, as you come up, you increase [the salt], a little bit see ... as you come to the top, now on the bottom, put all your- try to get your large if you could, pickle all your large, put it on the bottom, because it took longer you see, for the pickle to get into this thick fish you see.

MF: So how long would it take- would you be filling it up over a few days, one puncheon?

HJK: Oh no, no -- no ... you try to put it all in, oh no, you try -- whatever you could you put in the one barrel you see. (MF-2/3)

The amount of salt required to pickle a certain amount of fish fell within well defined limits. These ratios existed for many generations and were well known. I have come across a range of ways of describing the ratio of salt to fish.

These ratios were generally expressed in four different ways: fishing people sometimes assessed salt and fish according to the scale of the containers they used, for example, a certain number of gallons of salt would successfully cure a puncheon or butt of fish.²⁹ This could easily be converted to the number of gallons required to cure so many quintals of fish, since the number of quintals the pickling containers would ultimately produce was also well known.³⁰ As well, in various other oral and historical sources, the ratios of i) a hogshead of salt to quintals of fish and ii) the number of hogsheads needed to salt 100 quintals of fish were also common. These latter rules-of-thumb were clearly based on a much larger scale and were very likely impractical for use on a daily basis. My sense from talking with people and having compared these two basic scales of salting was that ongoing conversions between the small-scale and large-scale ratios were probably not necessary for day-to-day practice. At the end of a season some comparison might have been made to assess how efficient or not the salting had

²⁹This choice of ratio might have derived from the way I asked about the issue. That is, I frequently put the question in terms of how much salt was required to salt a butt *et al.* of fish. On the other hand based on the readiness with which people were able to supply me with the appropriate figures it is my belief that this was an established figure in their minds.

³⁰The accuracy of these estimates can be startling, but is very much the norm where people produce large quantities of a product, especially when it's one for which they are paid by the piece. The following provides an indication of how fish was kept track of:

When this tub was filled [with split fish], this was the fishermen's measurement of half a barrel. The fishermen would know how many barrels of fish they "put away" at any particular time and also for the whole season by counting the number of half barrels. The splitter would usually keep a tally of the number of tubs by cutting a notch for each one in a piece of board or sometimes in the edge of the splitting table or in the top board of the salt pound, if the pound were near where he was standing at the splitting table. (Bulgin 1978, 80)

I have seen and/or heard of such tally boards in various communities around Newfoundland. For a discussion of this type of precise estimation with reference to the herring fishery of the British Isles see Butcher 1987, 13.

been and then adjustment made, but this is speculation on my part. Finally, the most important test was whether the day-to-day quality of the finished product was satisfactory, but this had to be balanced against the price of salt. If a salter erred consistently in her or his amounts to the heavy-salted side (which was a common error made by young and inexperienced salters), but adjusted the fish-making so that fish was not too salty, then adjustments might be in order whenever this was discovered. At this time they might make use of the large scale ratios.³¹ On the other hand, many pickled fish operations consciously salted a little on the heavy side in order to give themselves leeway if the weather became damp.

Pickled fish, as noted, was the lightest of all cures and the earliest

³¹Given the factors above regarding these rule-of-thumb ratios, it would be optimistic, perhaps even suspect, to claim that the conversions and the related calculations I have made back and forth between them are particularly precise. To begin with, the hogshead is defined as a measure of approximately fifty imperial gallons, but this varied regularly over time and from place to place. For example, one source from Change Islands put a hogshead between 58 to 60 gallons (Budgell, 13). MacPherson notes that the measuring of salt by volume is antiquated and is very unsatisfactory and inexact, especially given the fact that different varieties had and have different densities (1935, 29-30). Furthermore, a quintal was usually a measure applied to dried cod fish, and was equal to a weight of 112 pounds. It would seem therefore that when people mention salt to fish ratios, and use the word quintal, they are referring to ratios of salt volumes to dried weight, and so, in fact, that amount of salt actually cured a much greater weight of wet fish (usually a ratio of between one to three and one to five). It appears, however, from the examples that I was provided with in the field, that some people did not use dried weight, but rather one form or another of "green weight" (whether before or after salting) for any number of reasons. This becomes abundantly clear if one calculates using dry weight: an unbelievably small amount of salt to fish ratios result and bear little or no relation to any documentary or historical estimates. This therefore requires that a conversion factor from wet to dried fish be settled on, another variable open to a large degree of variation based on the sizes and thicknesses of fish, weight at different stages in cleaning, and so forth.

For the calculations below, I use an average conversion factor of 1 to 3.5 (dry to wet weight), a number that falls toward the lower end of a range from 3 to 5. This choice reflects an attempt to adjust slightly for cases where the wet fish weight is based on fish not entirely gutted, headed, or split. The point remains, however, that trying to sort out historical salting ratios quickly and easily becomes unwieldy, convoluted, and prone to significant degrees of error. Finally I would argue that given four centuries of successful salt-fish making on the coasts of Newfoundland, that people's use of salt was precise and efficient. Mr. Con O'Brien of Bay Bulls, a salt-fish merchant recalled that only a small percentage of people regularly made had or "queer" fish (MF-20/21).

reference I found to the amount of salt that pickled fish required states that one hogshead (approximately 50 imperial gallons) salted 14.3 quintals of fish (Anspach 1827, 434).³² Of seven other sources that provide an indication of the amounts of salt required for pickling fish, two are very close to Anspach's number, that is, one hogshead to fourteen quintals (Frost 1979, 19; Miller 1979, 8-9); Devine's ratio is one hogshead to thirteen quintals (1990, 20); Perley records an estimate of one hogshead to twelve quintals, derived from two fishermen (1852, 94, 163-4); Mr. Willie John Randell's memory was that a hogshead pickled between fourteen and sixteen quintals of fish (personal communication, 1995). Wilson Hayward recalled a ratio of one hogshead to approximately twelve quintals of fish. The lowest estimate comes from the scientist, MacPherson, who does not seem to have done significant amounts of research on pickled fish. He suggests a conservative average of one hogshead for just over eleven quintals (1935, 32).³³ This is pretty much in line with his other estimates that also tend to the conservative (8-11).

Such variation can be understood from a number of vantage points. First, in the censuses of 1911, 1921 and 1935 it was reported that there were over 13,000 fishing rooms around Newfoundland and Labrador. Each of these represented a small-scale individual processing operation, and each had its own salter. There is

³²This figure is in turn based upon Anspach's observation that with pickling "a saving is made of near three upon every ten hogsheads of salt [as compared with dry or kench salting which required ten hogsheads to salt one hundred quintals of fish]" (1827, 433-4), that is one hogshead will salt over fourteen quintals of fish. A second figure of one hogshead for 13 quintals comes from Devine (1990, 20). This also correlates with figures provided by New Brunswick fish picklers to Perley (1852, 93-4; 163-64). There, a half bushel to the quintal was used, which works out to about 1 hogshead of salt for 12 quintals of fish or 8.33 hogsheads for 100 quintals. The greater amount of salt used there might have to do with larger fish and/or a warmer climate.

³³This latter estimate is likely very uncertain, as I calculated it from slightly vague figures in MacPherson's report.

no question that this state of affairs led to variation in salt amounts. In many respects, standardization of salt amounts, that is, rules of thumb for salting any variety of salt fish from heavy to light salted, were exactly that -- guiding principles tending to minimum requirements. People had little interest in wasting salt through over-salting or in producing fish that was too salty and therefore of low quality. Such rules of thumb in the case of salting were likely arrived at over generations of fish-processing efforts in the Newfoundland context, dating back to the 16th century.

It is clear that people were aware that different salters in Bonavista used differing amounts of salt to cure fish and that there were various reasons for doing so. Within any one operation, I believe it would be safe to assume that the older, experienced salter of a crew instructed and demonstrated to the up and coming salter(s) how to salt using the idiosyncratic amounts and techniques of their own method.³⁴ But even within a single operation, different amounts of salt were used to pickle fish depending on weather forecasting, the time of year (for example, fall weather was more unpredictable *v/s-à-v/s* drying conditions) (MF-14/15; NFM-38/39).

Laura and Doug Whiffen made the point that different crews used more or less salt, but that overall these differences were adjusted for in a number of ways,

³⁴This is not to say that other experiences could not influence their methods. Laura Whiffen's mother-in-law, Martha, went down on the Labrador as a young girl to cook, on a floater (small fishing schooner), and it was Laura's opinion that she could have picked up the basics of salting fish at that time. Martha had not come from a fishing family and so likely had little previous experience or hands-on practice. Yet, as salting Labrador floater fish is a much different heavy salting process, it is unlikely that those skills transferred into her husband's family's operation. As likely, her own mother-in-law, or whoever salted in her husband's family's crew, trained her in the art of the light pickling technique, much as Martha herself began to train Laura in the 1930s.

primarily by the length of time that different crews left fish in pickle.

LW: It wouldn't be so good if you had to leave it in pickle-

DW: If you- you know, some people we'll say, you know, when the salt melt on their fish, right Mom, [LW: Yes, right], you'd take it out. [LW: You'd take it out!] Now some people probably uh, you know, might uh, give it a little more salt probably than others, and- and if they let that then lie in the pickle, that'd be more salty. [LW: Yeah, wouldn't be good.] Wouldn't be good, see. [LW: Wouldn't be good see.]

LW: Had to get it at the right time.

DW: ... you could salt fish a little bit on the heavy side -- and [if] you got it out of pickle at the right time, it wouldn't have the salt -- they'd still have the right salt.

MF: It didn't matter, oh.

LW: Yeah... [words covered by Doug]

DW: And then probably light-salted. Light-salted now, was better, we'll say, if, probably ... leave them in a little longer, right Mom?

LW: Yes, right, yeah. (MF-14/15)

The reasons that one crew might use less or more salt than another also varied. Attempting to save on salt was one:

Oh -- a lot of people used to have bad fish then ... you had to buy your salt you see? ... This is where a lot of bad fish was ... half enough a salt. And then you could give it too much salt ... You had to be a- you know ... if you had to get it right you had to be a good- expert on salting pickled fish, otherwise you had bad fish. (MF-2/3)

In addition, too fresh and fish would rot in the sun, too much salt and the fish would be prone to salt and sun burn: it would crack apart as it dried and turn very white and hard, with the feel of "cardboard" (Frost 1979, 19). It seemed that some

salters erred on the side of caution and salted a little heavier; this provided a small grace period if weather turned poor for drying, though their fish could easily become too salty. Others who salted more lightly took a greater risk with the weather. Such lightly pickled fish had to be taken out of pickle and washed after three or four days regardless of the weather in order to prevent it from going sour.³⁵

With pickled fish, the length of time that the fish remained in pickle was remarkably standard, more so than with other types of more heavily salted fish. Three to five days was the range that I was told of again and again, with three and four days being the norm. If fish was in pickle for five days various problems -- for example, souring and oversalting -- were likely to be the result. The warmer the weather, the quicker and more easily the salt took to the fish and the faster the pickle would sour. In such weather three days was sufficient and five days very likely bad for fish.

The techniques of salting clearly demanded that its practitioners be remarkably flexible in relation to any number of factors. Salters had to be constantly assessing many variables, and adjusting the curing process at various points from start to finish. As will become clear, this was also the case with washing out and drying fish. As such, it was the salters and fish makers who were consistent, careful and constant in their attention to fish, from start to finish, who ended up with a good product.

³⁵Warm temperatures hastened the souring process and a concerted effort was made to keep pickling stages cool. This was mainly accomplished by insulating the roof of these buildings with growing sods. Many people I talked with in Bonavista recalled these sod roofs and one such roof can be seen in figure 3.2

New salters were apprenticed over a period of years. Older salters taught through direct demonstration, but observation on the part of younger trainees was equally important. Laura Whiffen, a kind of apprentice member of her husband's family's crew in the 1930s, was herself acquiring salting knowledge and skills. She spoke above of Martha Whiffen teaching her "how to salt a bit," of how much salt was needed for different kinds of fish, but also, by watching. Laura was clearly learning the techniques of quickly and efficiently salting fish from observing Martha at the work: as she said, "I used to look at her" (MF-14/15). William Wells of Change Islands in Notre Dame Bay stated: "A salter learned his trade by observation, at first he usually made many mistakes." (Budgell 1979, 4). These errors usually resulted in the over-salting of fish and its winding up salt-burned (4).

To this point I have focused largely on the description of techniques and practices and very little on the character and quality of the daily (and often nightly) labours of cleaning, splitting, and salting fish. With the large and sometimes huge catches of the caplin scull, the work also became incredibly laborious and cleaning and salting crews were pushed to their limits, sometimes for days at a time.

Many people recalled working all through the night, in stages dimly lit by smoking stage lamps, right through till dawn of the next morning, catching a quick nap, or no nap at all, and off again to haul traps or trawls again. This sort of regimen sometimes went on for days at a time. Jabez and Vera Ryder of Lance Cove recalled people falling asleep at their work, often continuing with the motions of their particular job, and others falling asleep on their way off to bed at dawn. Jabez commented wryly, "Hard racket for a living." P.K. Devine wrote in

1915 of the labours of the shore crew on the Northeast Coast in the 1860s and 70s:

Sometimes the catch was so large that the work went on till morning. Table hands were known to fall sound asleep, and still go on doing their work. It is told of one famous woman header, Kitty L---y, that when the work was all finished in the morning, she would wash down the splitting table, and get up on it, would put up her skirts, and dance an Irish jig to her singing....

Lights in all the stages around the harbour was a sight that filled the hearts of all with joy. Seldom is it seen today. The illumination from the cod oil lamps, hung over the splitting table, sent its rays out over the calm water, and made a golden sheen all along the waterfront, sometimes till dawn. It was the surest sign of a good fishery. Laughter and good-natured raillery were heard in every stage, and a casual comer or stranger visiting the place would say to himself, "Here are the happiest people on earth." (1990, 20-1)

People in Bonavista recalled these lit stages in all the little coves with much the same feeling. When the fish was in, the work was "steady go." Other historical commentators, going back to the 1670s, note this remarkably busy period during the height of the summer fishing season (Anspach 1827, 438-39; Downing 1676, n.p.). Mary Ann Martin recalled meals being brought down to meet the fishing boat as it arrived at the stage head. This was done to save time (especially when the stage and house were distant from each other as they were in her case). Again, the goal was to get the fish cleaned and salted as quickly as possible (MF-1). Bill Godwin of Barr'd Islands, on Fogo Island, recalled his baby sister being brought down to the stage from the house to be breast fed by his mother (Pocius 1992, 89).

Fish work was the top priority, but other tasks had to go on regardless, in spare moments stolen here and there. Bride Fitzgerald remembered her father, no matter how tired after a day's fishing and cleaning, going to cut the grass in haying

season; Laura Whiffen's mother-in-law would drag Laura up to the garden after a full day's work, to get in a little weeding. Animals had to be tended, bread baked, meals prepared, children seen to and so forth. Much of this was women's work. Heber John Keel emphatically recalled that *"The women worked harder than the men! Because they had their daily work- they had to wash and they had to clean."* He related the following anecdote to reinforce this point.

Gosh, I can see poor old mother now, to the table - every now and then, small fish eh, she'd chop off the puddock of the fish, see, right full of caplin eh? ... A small puddock, and throw out in the tub out there see? Now you know what you had to do -- when you see that going on you know what you had to do. You had to come up here -- if it was twelve o'clock in the night, with them three tubs on a car, and the dogs, for her cabbage, put it on her cabbage, that was her fertilizer see? You know....

Now she'd be up next morning then, planting then, and putting that around, heeling up the cabbage. (MF-2/3)

Fortunately, this working and living pace lasted between a month and a half and two months of the year. After the caplin scull, fish harvesting slackened off considerably, and the long days and nights around the splitting table and on the stage became less frequent. In communities and regions where the light salting of fish was the primary mode, it must also be kept in mind that fish had to come out of salt after the brief period of a few days for washing and then drying on the flakes (exploration detailed in chapter 4). It constituted a whole other kind of work that was carried on (in carefully managed fashion) at the same time as the fishing, cleaning and splitting. There was no question in the minds of the men and women who did the work that, at times, the steady and intense labour demanded by all of it verged on the brutal. This theme and the seemingly contradictory idea

that somehow these times and the world of the salt fishery were positive or happy continue to weave themselves through the accounts and memories that I turn to in chapter four.

It is clear from the above descriptions and discussions that the first two phases of processing salt fish -- cleaning and salting -- were complex and demanding tasks from start to finish. Careful attention to detail and technique were balanced against processing the fish as quickly as possible to get it split and under salt, especially in the hot summer days and nights. Almost every step of the work, though appearing straightforward, required "a knack," practise, and experience to perform it well. Some tasks, namely splitting and salting clearly required a good deal of skill and long experience if high quality fish was to result on a regular basis. Methods and skills were acquired through direct training of elder fish-makers, by observation of them, and by trial and error. The splitters and salters passed on and down their techniques and knowledge to the next generation, as their parents had to them, and so forth for many generations.

As well, it was obvious that every job demanded strength and the endurance built up from childhood to maintain the hectic and intensive work of the summer fishery. The men and women I talked with were equal to all of these requirements of the salt fishery despite the onerousness of the work and for the most part set about that work with diligence and with little complaint. In fact, it clearly had some pleasant aspects, not least of which was the bustling, vital sense of productivity that was renewed each spring and summer with the return of cod to their shores. In this sense, the salt-fish work was closely associated with much of the work of the other primary food producing sector, agriculture. Fishing people's

lives were intimately tied up with the rhythms of the seasons and the prolific seas, and when the price of fish and the weather were decent, and people worked hard at the multiplicity of other subsistence activities, they could look forward to a comfortable living.

In chapter four I turn to the next phase of salt-fish processing, the outdoor drying of fish on flakes. This was work that required a different set of skills and knowledge, relying more on careful and constant assessment and adjustment in relation to weather conditions and the application of long-standing traditional drying methods and expert knowledge. Drying the fish was also work that, in the pickled fish communities, was generally carried out by and under the direct control of shore crews made up primarily of women.

Chapter 4: Washing and Drying

The work of washing drying fish constituted a phase and set of practices distinct from the earlier stages of processing. The work was as laborious as the cleaning and salting phases, but the drying stage differed in a number of key respects with regard to the skills, expertise, and patterns of work required. The keys to the initial processing steps were speed and dexterity which were required to get fish off the water, cleaned, split correctly and under salt as quickly as possible. The making of salt fish required the careful application of a tremendous body of traditional knowledge. It required a continual assessment of the following variables: weather patterns; the amount of fish at various drying stages; the state and quality of that fish; and the people available to carry out the various tasks involved in the extended drying process (Budgell 1979, 11).¹ After assessing these variables, fish makers had to make decisions and adjustments in the fish making process in order to ensure that they dried the largest amount of high quality fish possible.

Fish makers needed to know the various steps and actual techniques applied to the drying. They needed to know by the look and the feel of the fish when a load was ready to move from one step to the next. They needed to be able to identify various threats that could cause the quality of the fish to deteriorate and they needed to know what steps to take once these threats were identified. It was

¹This knowledge and these skills were based on years of experience and traditional passing on of the knowledge and skills over many generations. Techniques and the terminologies used to describe drying fish by John Downing, a planter of the mid-17th century, were repeated to me by the men and women who made fish up to the mid-20th century (Downing 1676; see appendix 2). In the descriptions and citations below the reader will find a mixture of closely allied historical and contemporary sources -- a clear testimony to the remarkable continuity in effective traditional work patterns and techniques.

this complex understanding of fish, learned via years of apprenticeship² and experience, combined with a commitment to quality that made good fish and a good fish maker.

The basic steps of the drying phase were i) a washing of fish upon its removal from salt; ii) a short period of piling to press out some of the pickle and water still on and in the fish; and iii) an extensive and complex drying stage which involved numerous spreadings and pilings. Fish were piled using certain specific methods at different times. Drying could go on for as long as six weeks depending on the weather, but more usually took two to three. The first few days after being washed, fish was known as "waterhorse" or "waterhorse fish" and was at its most delicate, being very vulnerable to a number of threats. Beyond the waterhorse stage many of the worst threats, which included bacterial and fungal infections due to damp weather and sunburn caused by hot sunny weather, were less immediate.

Below I will describe the process of washing and drying salt fish, focusing on the elements of traditional knowledge and technique that were brought to bear in the work. All of these techniques, the large body of knowledge grounding them, and the attentiveness of the people making the fish were all directed towards one aim -- to bring pickled fish as close to a state of perfection as possible. Good making gave light-salted fish a particular golden-amber hue (some describe it as a "greenish cast") and a slightly soft or doughy feel. On the face of the fish salt showed in a way that was described as "floury" by many (although it could not be

²My research in Bonavista indicates that young (usually married) women that belonged to fishing crews were often informally apprenticed by the senior fish maker of their shore crew, often their mother-in-laws. This training seems to have begun in earnest following their marriages. However my sample is very small so this assertion is highly speculative and may apply more to cod trap operations than to smaller hook and line operations. See section 4.1 below.

brushed off). The faces of excellent fish also had a smooth dry feel to them. All of the qualities which made a perfect pickled fish were very well known to all pickled fish makers and all of them worked towards emulating these, for fish with such qualities fetched a markedly better price when it was sold according to its grade.

Fish makers were working to produce a commodity that came close to being a "handicraft" in terms of the technical requirements and type of labour that went into its production (Alexander 1977, 75). The person in charge of the drying operation was thus akin to any skilled craftsperson whose work involved the careful experienced application of knowledge to a product over an extended period of time (for example, farmers, vintners, brewers, cheese makers). The more knowledgeable and attentive the "shore skipper" and her crew were, the better the salt fish that resulted. In this case I use the indefinite pronoun "her" for a good reason, for it is clear that women were the almost invariably in charge of drying pickled fish. Evidence I have come across from other areas suggests that women were integral to drying all the other classes of fish as well.

After establishing that fact in the opening descriptive section of the chapter I will discuss some of the reasons women were so involved in the drying process. My reasons for doing this are twofold: as noted in the introduction to the thesis, the contribution of women to the fishery, the backbone of the Newfoundland economy for over four centuries, has been severely underrated for many years. Second, I believe that by assessing their crucial work in that fishery, we begin to uncover and understand their place within their communities, not to mention the

communities themselves.³

Besides the long traditions of technique and expert knowledge, drying fish was characterised by another set of traditions: hard and intensive physical labour were part and parcel of the demanding work (just as they were in the cleaning and salting phases). One woman I talked with stated that at certain times in the summer, the busiest season, even children took a back seat to the primary concerns -- the fishery and gardens. These two occupations were essential in providing a livelihood for these same children in the coming winter.

As noted in previous chapters, for hundreds of years at the height of the caplin scull through late June and early July, people frequently worked literally around the clock at the fish, their gardens and at maintaining their households (Anspach 1827, 438-39; Devine 1990, 20-1; Downing 1676). People laboured hard and long striving to get ahead through the fishing season, but generally they managed to maintain a standard of living just above subsistence. Men and women worked constantly to ensure that their families remained as far above that line as possible. Despite the tremendous physical demands and meagre returns, many of the women and men I talked with recalled with pleasure various aspects of their work. There is no denying this fact. Many enjoyed being outdoors in the sunshine and fresh air, engaged in work that was varied and complex enough to remain interesting especially when mixed with other tasks. Many were very proud of the top quality salt fish they produced through skill and hard work. It was

³As noted in the introduction, in the last fifteen or so years much important work on women's roles in Newfoundland has been accomplished and it continues to go on -- this is a small contribution by comparison.

certainly more interesting and less "tiresome"⁴ than the mechanized repetitive work of the fish plants that came later.

Finally however, not one single fishing person I talked with could reconcile the overall strenuous demands of the salt fishery with the small return they received for that labour. This might have had something to do with the fact that many of them came of age in the Depression years -- the hardest times in living memory, but it is clear that life in the salt fishery was always a daunting proposition in various respects.

Given the people's memories of the Depression and the mechanization that came with the fresh fish plants in the 1950s, it is little wonder that people did not need much inducement to switch to fresh fish or leave the fishing industry altogether. This exodus from the salt fishery speaks volumes about fishing people's perceptions of mercantile capitalism (and about many of its realities). It too had a long tradition of more or less unfair practices and economic distribution. This receives full treatment in chapter six, but I conclude this chapter with a preliminary consideration of the basic tensions between the positive and negative forces at work within the industry and its communities.

4.1 Fish Makers: The Centrality of Women

With the pickled fish in Bonavista and many other places in Newfoundland, the washing and drying work was carried out by shore crews in which women played an integral role from the 1920s to the 1950s (and, my impression is, for many preceding generations as well). As the fish moved further onto the land and

⁴As Laura Whiffen, who did both kinds of work, put it (personal communication, 1995).

away from the water (the domain of men), women became more and more central to its processing. This applies especially where pickled or other lightly salted fish was made. Women organized and oversaw the 'making' of fish. For the three or four generations preceding its demise, women were almost entirely in charge of the drying of pickled fish in many communities on the east coast where it dominated as a method. Men and children were called on to a lesser degree and usually in times of an emergency when weather threatened the fish (and therefore everyone's livelihoods) or for big tasks such as preparing a large load of fish for shipment to the merchant. Women made other types of heavier salted fish as well, but men were likely to play more significant roles in these processes.

The woman-centred nature of this work was described over and over again during my fieldwork and in many other primary and secondary documentary sources (Anspach 1810; Bulgin 1978, 91; Budgell 1979, 5; Cadigan 1995, 51-3; Devine 1990, 19-23; Frost 1979, 15; Hatcher 1978, 2; Jukes 1993, 27; Miller 1979, 9-10; Murray 1979, 12-16; Neis 1993, 190; Porter 1993, 47-49; Rixon 1981, 12-13).⁵ The women and men I talked with frequently and forcefully stressed the role of women in making fish. Mr. Humphries of Cape Freels stated, "The women

⁵It is important to note that this list represents a wide geographic range of locations. Taken with the range of locales covered by my own fieldwork, it can safely be said that women were integral to drying fish (and frequently salting and cleaning it too) in communities in every bay and along every coast of the island and Labrador although there may be some places such as the Southern Shore where women were somewhat less involved in the overall processing. (This needs further investigation.) In the cod-trap fishery where earnings were higher and in some hook and line operations in Bonavista, young women were often hired as domestics to mind small children and to cook and clean. This allowed the women members of the fishing operation to concentrate on making fish (Laura Whiffen, MF-14/15; Frost 1979, 16; Miller 1979, 2-3; Murray 1979, 98). It also helped to further train young women in the indispensable skills of managing a household *et al.* -- something they would likely have to be able to do within a few years in their own homes (if they married). The other main function of this shipped labour seems to have been to relieve parents of the support of daughters (Neis 1993, 193).

worked like slaves. When we'd be gone fishing they'd wash it out ... and spread it on the flakes" (Rixon 1981, 12). Bennett March of Brownsdale, Trinity Bay summed up the work of his mother, a salter and fish maker, in the following way: "My mother, she salted -- and ... she almost lived over on the flake" (NFM-30). This sentiment was echoed almost exactly by Mr. George Groves of Bonavista who stated that both his mother and his wife "lived on the flake" (Crewe 1981, 14).

Bride Fitzgerald remembered her father, Dan, of Spillars Cove having the odd argument with Bride's mother over not helping with the flake work. When accused of laziness he would reply, "Agnes ... I goes out and catches the fish, I'm not going to make them on the land." Bride also recalled that if her mother was sick, her father and brothers "hardly ever come out on the flake" to help her with the fish. "And Mom ... she used to bawl at them, and she said, 'You're just too lazy for to eat!' " Dan replied, " 'Well that's not our job you know. When we bring it to the land for you, you's got to make it' " (MF-6/7). Bulgin comments that there was an old saying in Twillingate, "The men ketch [sic] it and the women make it" (1978, 91).

Part of the reason that women were the main makers of pickled and other light-salted fish was due to its quick curing in the salting phase. Every three to five days fish which was being pickled had to be washed out and moved onto the flakes. With light-salted fish "dry-salted" in bulks or pounds, that period lasted anywhere from approximately five to twenty-one days making it possible for men to be more involved in the processing.⁶ When men were heavily engaged on the

⁶However, at least two sources claim that the lightest dry-salted cod could be in under salt for as little as three days (Budgell 1979, 5; John Feltham, personal communication, 1995.) Another very early source claims twenty four hours (Collins 1682, 93). Given the fact that no other sources claim such a

water almost every day, especially during the summer fishery, women made up the shore crews around most of the island. Later on in the summer and into the fall as the fishing slackened off somewhat and there were more days of rough weather, men could and often did play a larger role in the washing and making of fish. However, women clearly did the bulk of this crucial and laborious shore work through the summer and the fall.

My research with women, although limited in breadth (see chapter two), indicated that the work they did was governed by a number of patterns, at least in certain kinds of crews. With larger operations, in this case those organized around cod-traps, groups of women worked their flakes together. These women were generally related, usually by marriage. Various arrangements were possible, but a general rule seems to have been that the wives of the sharemen in a crew worked together at drying fish, though often it was only sharemen who were more direct kin of the trap owner-operator (that is sons) whose wives took part.⁷ Regardless of this, in the shore crews of trapping operations, two to three women worked together to make fish. The most experienced and/or senior of these women generally directed this work.

Laura Whiffen who made fish from 1931 to 1955 in Old Cove (see figure 3.2) described her mother-in-law, Martha, as one such person. On their flakes

brief period and that the commentator seems never to have been to Newfoundland, the claim is somewhat dubious.

⁷It has been reported that in certain places, young women who were shipped to better-off families as domestics often helped on the flakes (Neis 1993, 192). In the cases of this economic relationship that I came across, as well as in various documentary sources, servant girls were employed to run the domestic sphere, allowing the women of the fishing operation to work the flakes. See footnote five above.

Martha was "the director" of activities. She made the decisions and assessed the weather in consultation with known forecasters (Devine 1990, 23). Martha also gave directions to her daughters-in-law as she had once been given them by her own mother-in-law -- and these were acts which formed an ongoing, unbroken process of training for numerous generations. Laura stated that it took two to three years on the flakes before she considered herself anywhere near as qualified or competent as Martha.

In smaller hook-and-line operations, shore crews often consisted of just one woman working at times with her husband and children to make fish. Mary Ann Martin's mother was the main splitter, salter, and fish maker of her family's operation. Mary Ann recalled her working their two flakes, more or less on her own. This was not unusual (Murray 1979, 14).

In these smaller scale operations, the fish-making apprenticeships were likely not so clearly defined or necessarily complete as described above for Laura Whiffen. In my fieldwork with women I spent a good deal of time attempting to ascertain the training process that girls experienced or went through to prepare them for flake work. Interestingly enough, most of the women I talked with received little detailed training as girls (MF-17/18; MF-14/15; MF-4/5; MF-1). Children generally were expected to and did help out when rain threatened (Murray 1979, 38), but the majority of the women I talked with did not participate much in labour or training until after marriage. This speculative finding may have been the simple result of a small sample though there is also some documentary evidence (see footnote five). Four of the five women whom I asked said they were not expected to help on the flakes on a daily apprenticeship basis during their

girlhoods. Of these four, two were connected to hook-and line-operations (MF-14/15; MF-1). Only one woman, Bride Fitzgerald of Spillars Cove, recalled doing a good deal of flake work as a young girl.

One possible reason for this is that training in other crucial tasks -- gardening and domestic spheres for example -- took place in the younger years. Another intriguing concept that I came across was that young girls were enlisted to dry many barrels of caplin during the summer for dog-food (MF-17/18; Murray 1979). This could have been a preliminary training for later fish-making -- practising, as it were, on products not directly connected to important earnings. Mary Ann Martin pointed out that in her family's hook-and-line operation, the children were not often entrusted with the daily work of making fish and were often scolded for sloppy work when they did help out (MF-1). The making of fish was in many ways a very serious business and demanded serious attention, a matter I will turn to in a moment.

In addition to making fish women were required to perform a whole range of other tasks including cooking, cleaning, knitting, sewing, berry-picking, gardening and, child and elder care. The following quote from Mrs. Humphries, originally of Cape Freels, evokes the sense of her daily round during the fishing season:

"We worked almost as hard as the men ... when they come in from fishing, we used to got to work to get their breakfast. Then we'd go down to the stage. I used to head most of the fish, you know.... I used to like to be at heading the fish eh. My sister-in-law used to cut the throats, you know. When we get that put away, the men used to go on again. We'd be up to the house scrubbing on the board our clothes, making a bit of bread, cakes, stuff like that you know; sometimes in the garden, hauling the weed out of the potatoes and that. We worked hard you know. We'd be at the grass ...

trying to get a bit for the horses for the winter, you know.... When they'd get the fish, then, well, we used to wash the fish .. bring it out and spread the fish and go back for more.

To put a bit of bread in the oven, it's not like it's now, just turn the button ... we used to put a couple of billets of wood in and go down [to the wharf] and when we think the bread be baked, have to come up and wash hands, take pinny off.... take bread out and go down at it again. There's no stop. I suppose we start in June to September, eh.... We'd make fish to October month some years, you know.... Scrubbing on the board used to be bad, you know, scrubbing clothes. No washer. I only had a washer three year before I came in here [came in to St. John's, circa 1962] ... Used to take the kids in little round baskets and take them down to the flakes, put them on the flake till you get the fish spread.... The same thing at the gardens, take the kids up in this little round basket and put them down, give them something to eat.... I really worked hard all my life, you know, harder than I works now, you know." (Rixon 1981, 13)

Many of the women of Bonavista who worked making fish and had no one to mind their infant children would bring them up on the flakes while they worked. Laura Whiffen recalls them using butts for play-pens.

Toddlers -- well they'd bring them up -- I tell you -- the little toddlers, they have a -- well it was a butt -- that high, la ... she'd bring them up -- and it was a clean one, you know, and put them in a butt. And they'd give them play things -- they'd play there -- they was quiet little children -- those was.... and they'd play there in that tub till they'd get the fish done and then they'd carry them up. (MF-14/15)

Hubert Mouland of Bonavista recalled his wife carrying their son up on the flakes in a box (Crewe 1981, 23). Mrs. Melita Guy also heard that women would use puncheon tubs and often gave babies a "sugar tit" (sugar wrapped in gauze) as a pacifier (MF-17). As soon as there were siblings old enough to mind younger sisters and brothers, parental baby-sitting was no longer necessary.

It is important to conclude this section with some final remarks about how

serious drying fish was. This work of women substantially increased the value of the fish - a fact too often overlooked.⁸ The proper washing and drying of the fish were critical to making a living in the salt fishery.⁹ Because of this importance, fish making took on significance in relation to community status (Small 1979, 48-50). Women being the key actors in that work derived status from it. Wilson Hayward described to me one day that the women fish makers in his neighbourhood were very aware of their status and worked hard to produce good looking, good quality fish -- the quality of that work defined them on some basic levels in relation to their peers and neighbours. Keeping an orderly, tidy flake, taking good care of the fish day in and day out were all matters that affected personal identity, status and esteem (much like keeping an orderly household did and does-- see for one example, Murray 1979, 34). When I asked him if certain women were known for their fish, he responded immediately -- "You know they were!" When their fish was graded and sold to the merchants, it did not take long for the report of how it had fared to circulate through the neighbourhood. Laura Whiffen asserted that her mother-in-law, Martha, was known to be an excellent fish maker on the Cape. Clearly fish making was important to fishing women's sense of their selves in their communities.

⁸Andrew 1969, Antler 1977, and Antler and Faris 1979, 149-50 are three exceptions.

⁹People were careful, for example, with fish in relation to "spending" with it during the summer on treats or luxuries. Melita Guy related how her grandmother as director of the operation's flake was the only person allowed to give them (as children) the odd fish to take to the merchant's to buy candy. This did not happen that often and was a special treat (MF-17/18). Jabez Ryder mentioned that the flakes often had gates on their ramps, ostensibly to keep dogs off, but he noted that they also slowed down brazen young men trying to make off with a few fish for a purchase. He mentioned his father chastising and chasing these young men off the flakes from time to time (MF-4/5). It is clear that fish could not be squandered.

This work was also carried out along with a whole range of other duties from child care, cooking, and cleaning to gardening, berry-picking and drying hay (the latter items of this list often generating products for sale as well as domestic consumption). Heber John Keel echoed the sentiments of many others: "The women worked harder than the men! Because they had their daily work- they had to wash and they had to clean ... No, they had a hard life boy, the women had a hard life, worse than what the men had."

4.2 Fish Making: Washing and Drying

The following concise description of making pickled fish by Wilson Hayward of Bonavista provides a fine starting point for a more elaborate discussion on the intricacies of the various steps of the process.

Pickled fish was the best ... it was a different fish altogether ... twas not so much salt into it -- you know -- and you'd just give it the amount of salt that you [could] take it out we'll say in 3 days, 4 days, even if twas there in 5 days, twouldn't hurt -- but you usually take it out in 4 days and you wash it, you wash it all clean, and you take it on your flakes, you spread it on the boughs -- we used to have our flakes covered with flat boughs -- you know you take the limbs off the trees ... now during the summer the leaves used to drop off when they'd dry and ... then the wind blow up underneath it, up through the boughs and that on the flakes, you know, you make excellent fish -- you take it up in what they call faggots first, 3 or 4 fish on each other, and then when it dry a bit more, you put it in bigger faggots, you cover it over. Then after a couple days, good drying days, you put it in a pile, what they called a pile -- he'd be round. And you keep it there then for a couple days, you cover it over with the rinds you cut off of the trees you know and that. You cover it over, now it used to work there, and when it come out of that it would be flattened right out, you know, and the fish'd be worked and that, you spread it out then, you carry it in your store, then and good bye, then until you get ready for to ship ... you put it out before you shipped. We used to have the flakes full and we spread it on the beach and carry it down on the beach and that then we have trucks come from the

merchants you know on horse and cart. (NFM-35/36/37)

The first two steps of washing and lugging the fish were particularly onerous and for the most part disliked by those who had to do them (Miller 1979, 13).

Washing fish was sloppy, dirty and heavy work that involved the constant hauling of copious amounts of water and a tremendous amount of bending to work on the fish. Sea water was usually used, but in locations where fresh water was readily available and seawater was at too great a hauling distance, fresh was frequently resorted to. Both Bride Fitzgerald and Mary Ann Martin helped haul fresh water from nearby streams to wash fish. This was heavy enough work in itself. Mrs. Martin said that nearly everyone in Grates Cove where she grew up used fresh water to wash waterhorse (MF-1). Women in Bonavista who did use sea water had the extra hauling distance from the stage head back to the salting stage.

Laura Whiffen's crew used sea water and washed a good amount of fish in the pickling tubs and butts themselves, as she explains:

Well the first we'd do, we wash out the fish -- well we wash out the fish, and we carry it up too [to the flake], when the men be on the water, but when the men'd be there, they'd carry up some. And we'd spread it -- we salt it first, you know ...

we wash it out with water, salt water -- draw it up on the stage head, we used to call it a stage head. And we'd draw it up and put that in [on the fish], make a little hole, we'd dip out the pickle first, and when we'd make a hole in the butt and we put the water in and we'd wash it. And then when that'd [water] get dirty ... we dip out the other water and we put more in the puncheon, added clean. And we put more water in it, clean water.

MF: so you put the water right onto the fish as you were washing it, in the butt that they were in ...

LW: Yeah, well I tell you what we'd do now-- we'd take up the first layer of fish that was in the butt -- or two layers and we'd put it to one side. And we'd dip up- we'd make a hole there and then we'd dip out the pickle, the dirty pickle -- then we'd throw the water in, fresh water in, and we'd wash out that with a cloth and have that clean. So we'd put it in tubs. Well, the next fish, the next couple tiers then, we done in the butt, down in the puncheon tub, then we dip out more water, what we could dip, all the dirty water then we'd put more water in, fresh water, and we'd wash out that. That's like we wash out our fish.

MF: Ok, work your way down.

LW ... you work your way down.

MF: So you wouldn't take it from the butt and put into another tub or anything?

LW: No, no. Sometimes we would now -- we have a great big butt, but this be a short- short- when we had the puncheon tub -- we called it the puncheon tub. We'd uh, do that ourselves you know. But when we had a butt, we used to have to take it out, for fresh water.

MF: Ok, because it would be too deep?

LW: It'd be too deep to wash. (MF-14/15)

Fish in Bonavista was most often washed in tubs generally of the puncheon variety, which were large with wide openings and accommodated a good many fish at the same time.¹⁰ Washers used various tools and implements with which to scrub and wash. The most usual was a clean scrap of cloth, frequently cotton.

¹⁰In many places in Newfoundland a much larger container often called a "ramshorn" was used. It was a large rectangular box, big enough for a few people to stand in, with boards nailed far enough apart to allow water to drain away easily. The ramshorn was actually placed in the water either on a beach or lowered by ropes over the sides of schooners. Fish was placed in the water in the ramshorn and the washers got down in it with the fish to wash them. Ramshorns were generally used in the offshore or banks fishery and in places with beaches. They were less practical in rocky or steep locations.

Mary Ann Martin's family of Grates Cove used cloths and mops that men made in the winter time, and which she described this way:

MAM: They used to have those mops ... they'd make [them] - they'd make - - that was the winter's trade -- to get the mops ready ... Yeah. Then they'd clean it with the mops.

MF: And what were they like, what were the mops like? ...

MAM: Oh, just made out of like jeans, old jeans, cut out or something like that you know.

MF: Ok, strips of?

MAM: Yeah, and it was made and cut right round? It was round just like a dinner plate, as big as that [gestures to plate] and as thick as that [gestures again] ... and a handle in it ... a long handle -- like a mop you know, like a bought mop ... And they used to wash the fish with that ... They used to have a lot of mops made. Five or six I suppose. (MF-1)

Bulgin lists a number of other scrubbing implements: scraps of linnen from fish nets, old vamps (woolen socks), scrubbing brushes, cloths, brin bags nailed together and fastened to a short handle and so on. Some people scrubbed the backs of fish on other fish, though many regarded this as bad for the final quality of the fish. Many also thought that too harsh an implement roughened the face of the fish. The most common were vamps and cloths as they cleaned more gently. Different operations favoured different tools and washing methods (Bulgin 1978, 87-8).

Fish had to be washed to remove a number of substances. First of all washing removed pickle and any remaining salt. If left on the fish, this salt could lead to salt-burn when the fish was being dried, leaving it white or "pickly" as Bulgin describes it (1978, 88). Blood stains were also scrubbed off, as well as

various kinds of slub or "scurf" that coated fish at different times of year and the black skin on the napes (up near the fins). This latter practice, sometimes called whitenaping (MacPherson 1935, 25-6), might also be carried out before salting. Some crews did not bother or did not have the time, especially during the busy season (see figure 3.8 which depicts three fish, one that has been partly whitenaped and two that have not). Those who did do whitenaping generally improved the quality of their fish. Mary Ann Martin's family hook-and-line crew did take the time to do it:

MAM: Well they had- they had a puncheon, they used to keep, uh, what they used to call their butts ... a puncheon sawed in two? ... They used to call that the butt. And they'd fill that with clean water, and then they put the fish into that, and wash it with that. Sometimes Grandfather took a big board down, square, you know? Fit it on the- put the fish on and wash it like that? And everything had to be cleaned off -- the black on the sides ... clean as anything.

MF: And the black was from the skin or was that the blood?

MAM: No, that was just the bit of black was on the side of the fish, the fin and ... all that had to be cleaned [MF: taken off?] Oh yes, and it would be white as snow when it would be washed [MF: the flesh?] Yeah. (MF-1)

The amount of pickled fish that was washed out at any one time depended on how much fish was being caught. According to one person I talked with, an operation with three or four women making fish could wash anywhere between two and ten butts of fish a day. With two and a half quintals per butt, from five to twenty-five quintals of fish might come out of salt on a single day. (Ten butts was of course an exceptional amount -- ten to fifteen quintals was considered a big day in Wilson Hayward's estimation (personal communication, 1995). Laura Whiffen recalled washing between two to five butts or five to twelve quintals of fish per

day (personal communication, 1995).

At the point of washing, the fish still weighed nearly twice its eventual dry weight, so a crew washing out twenty or more quintals would be moving over 4400 pounds of fish.¹¹ An average day for the fish makers of a hook-and-line crew might be closer to between five and seven quintals (two and three butts). For a trap crew, an average day lay between seven and twelve quintals (or three to five butts and between 1500 and 2700 pounds) (Willie John Randell, personal communication, 1995).

After the fish had been washed and scrubbed it was called waterhorse or waterhorse fish. During this stage, especially the first few days after being washed, the fish were still green or wet, and very fragile and susceptible to a number of conditions. Laura Whiffen remembered her mother-in-law, Martha's advice: "Mrs. Whiffen used to say to us: 'You handle that now' -- 'cause they was great big ones -- 'You handle that now like you handle your baby.' That's what she'd tell us. I never forgot that" (MF-14/15). With even one or two good drying days, fish would harden out of this precarious state and into the next stage (Bennett March, NFM-30). From that point on fish needed less acute 'mothering,' but a series of steps still had to be followed to ensure a proper and full curing to produce a high quality fish. At each stage in this process, fish makers again had to regularly check the state of the fish and the weather and adjust the drying accordingly. With excellent drying conditions fish could go from waterhorse to being ready for sale in about ten to twelve days.

¹¹With other heavier salted fish which lay in salt for many weeks at a time, much larger loads could be washed out at the one time, sometimes up to fifty quintals (Story et al 1990, 602).

To begin the waterhorse stage, the fish was often placed in a pile of the same name in the stage to drain for varying lengths of time, although some crews would not drain waterhorse fish at all.¹² The draining was carried out for a number of reasons, one which Willie John Randell outlines in describing his family's method:

... you could lay away fish on.... wash your longers ... the floor of your stage eh and lay it away... put in press eh -- we used to call it put in press - - you'd wash it out in the evening see. Then you put it on there, and lay it there all night, well that would be so good as 4 or 5 hours dry time. I use that now at the store -- washes it out in the evening and puts it in press overnight eh ... you could put on 5 or 6 layers eh ... a dozen layers -- you could have 2 foot deep ... if you want to ... that would sort of press the water out, dry it up eh. (NFM-38/39)

Draining fish also lightened the load that had to eventually be carried up onto a flake. Most crews would pile waterhorse fish for at least a few hours and many did so overnight. Bride Fitzgerald and her mother often left fish for twenty four hours. They washed it out one morning and put it out the next (MF-6/7). Laura Whiffen's crew laid their fish on boards, but she agreed with Willie John Randell and many others that it was said that piling waterhorsing fish "was as good as a day's drying" (MF-14/15). She described the piles as three to five tiers high,

¹² Bulgin gives the following explanation and range of definitions from the Twillingate area for the term waterhorse:

The name given to the pile of wet fish just washed was a "water horse." There seemed to be a difference of opinion over this term among several people of Twillingate. Some contended that the term referred to newly washed fish whether it was left in a pile to drain or not. Others reserved the term, not to refer to the fish, but to the 'heap or pile of wet fish lying on the stage floor for the pickle to drain away. Possibly the term got its origin from the fact that the pile of fish turned faces down, somewhat resembled the back of a horse. (1978, 89-90)

I too got a similar range of explanations for what comprised waterhorse fish. See also Story et al., 1990, 602. Devine claims that fish was commonly left in waterhorse to drain for as long a period as two to four days (1990, 21-2).

the bottom tier back down and the remaining tiers back up, much like the construction of the faggot (see discussion of the faggot below and figure 4.1).

The other reason waterhorse fish was made into piles in the stage was to provide temporary storage. If the weather was too damp and a load of fish needed to be taken out of pickle and washed in order to prevent its souring or becoming too salty, then the waterhorse piling was resorted to. In fact, this was the most common reason for which Laura Whiffen's mother-in-law would decide to put fish into such piles for any extended period. Unfortunately, fish could only be stored in waterhorse piles for three to four days before serious deterioration set in. The two main threats were the onset of slime and the possibility of fly-spits -- that is, fly eggs laid on green fish especially in the thick meat of the nape. Slimy fish was the more obnoxious because at this stage flies could only get at some of the fish in the top layers of the pile. A precaution taken to ward off both was the casting of small amounts of salt through the waterhorse (MacPherson 1935, 40; Bulgin 1978, 85). If bad weather persisted and the bacterial action that caused the slime set in, more drastic steps were taken to salvage what fish could be saved. These included re-salting and then re-washing entire loads. This, of course, lowered the quality of the fish (Anspach 1827, 440).

When the weather cooperated, the step following the draining of the waterhorse fish was to carry it out and up onto the flakes for its first spreading; so began the drying. Along with a good many others, Laura Whiffen characterized the carrying of the waterhorse as the hardest physical work of all (MF-14/15). In certain fishing rooms around Cape Bonavista (and elsewhere around the island, it was nothing short of brutish). Willie John Randell described the work involved in



**Figure 4.1: A faggot of fish on a flake in New Bonaventure
(Photo courtesy of Brian Miller and
Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklife and Language Archive).**



carrying fish out of places such as Lance Cove on the Trinity Bay side of the Cape as follows:

Sometimes you had to carry it about probably a couple hundred feet or whatever up the side of a cliff. If you'd seen the places what people had to take it you'd say "How was it ever done?" you know, "how'd them ever do it?" eh, tough work eh? (NFM-38/39)

Lance Cove is pictured in figure 4.2. Initially the salting stages in Lance Cove were down on the beach and fish was carried from below up to the top of the cliff. In later years the Ryders, who fished in Little Lance Cove right next to (Big) Lance Cove, built their salting stage on top of the cliff and hoisted their fish up from the water with an engine (MF-4/5).

Heber John Keel's family fished in Red Cove and had their flakes on top of a steep seventy-five foot bank (figure 4.3) (the bank has since been significantly cut down by a gravel operation). In order to climb up from the salting stages, two diagonal paths were made in the bank, crossing each other to form a gigantic 'X.' Men and women crew-members zigzagged their way up these paths with tubs of fish for the flake. Heber John ruefully recalled the work of carrying up the shallop's tub full of green fish with a gully stick. He goes on to describe a trip to Lance Cove for bait with the same apparatus. This remarkable testimony depicts the sheer work regularly done by men and women (he ends with a comparison between that work and the work required in the modern era of the pick-up truck).

It was more than exercise boy, twas murder, that's all I call it ... For a boy like that, I mean, who was a young man, 15 or 16-year-old, and had to start in at that -- you know -- if I had to take my son down there now, I'd almost shoot 'em first, yeah.

MF: [laughs incredulously] If you had to go back?

**Figure 4.2: Big Lance Cove, near Bonavista
(Trinity Bay side of Cape).**



**Figure 4.3: Red Cove, Bonavista,
looking north to Comer Cove and Durdle's Gulch.**



HJK: If I had to go- *Yes my son*. Take that on your back like that?! I say, no boy, better to drown you -- almost, than put you through that -- yeah, Yes siree.

MF: It was that bad eh? Murder.

HJK: Murder, murder, yeah. I can remember- well Lance Cove from here [over a mile] ... well you take a one o'clock in the morning now and take that [gully stick and tub] on your back like that, and take a cast net and your oil clothes and go down over that bank at Lance Cove, and catch that tub of caplin and bring it up on the bank and get a smoke, and then put it on your back, in the dark, coming across the hills ... and lug that across and lug it to your, bring it across to your punt ... at one o'clock in the night, you can imagine what it was like now -- and the sweat coming off ... couldn't see nothing- and not taking it off your back -- right on -- just change over. "All right, change over!" "Ok, change over." Walk on, in the dark. Come up like that. *Now I did that -- not only me*, but a lot of boys was growing up like that -- did that in my day. They had to do that. But *now see*, you got the pick-up.¹³ (MF-2/3)

In the Bonavista area, in addition to hauling waterhorse fish up over cliffs, it had to be carried up onto flakes that were anywhere from eight to twenty feet high. The flakes for spreading fish were generally of the old English variety and fish was carried onto them by way of ramps (figure 4.4 and 4.5). High flakes involved more labour to build them and to work on, but were thought to be better for air circulation (Anspach 1827, 435-436). They were constructed of longers laid over horizontal supports in turn held up by posts and shores (figure 4.6).¹⁴ Heber

¹³Mr. Keel went on to develop a humorous and slightly biting comparative commentary on the distinctions between "old" and "new" work and the striking distinctions between the two (MF-2/3). This commentary helps to drive home a point about the world of work in the salt fishery -- it was brutally demanding. It is work that people (such as myself) who did not experience it, can never have any real sense of, but sheer toil that we need to try to depict, understand, respect, and even honour.

¹⁴Posts are self-explanatory and shores are posts set slanted into the ground as a support for whatever structure of which it is a part (Story *et al.* 1992, 477). See figure 4.6.

**Figure 4.4: Levi Abbott's flake and store,
Mockbeggar, Bonavista.**



**Figure 4.5: Levi Abbott's store, flake ramp and flake,
Mockbeggar, Bonavista.**



Figure 4.6: Posts and shores of Levi Abbott's flake.



John Keel estimated that his family's flake, which would be similar to that of families with one trap, was about 100' by 100', but their sizes and numbers depended on the land available and the size of the operation.

Up to the 1950s, flakes were a dominating feature of the landscapes of most fishing communities. Wilson Hayward of Bonavista, along with so many others, described his family's fishing spot in Red Cove as being literally clogged with flakes to the point that one man had a flake that was built right up to and covering one side of his house. Jukes describes the typical fishing community of 1839:

The first thing that strikes a stranger on entering a harbour in Newfoundland is the abundance of what are called the fish flakes and stages, together with the wooden wharfs and the great dark red storehouses. The fish flakes consist of a rude platform, raised on slender crossing poles, ten or twelve feet high, with a matting of sticks and boughs for a floor. On these the fish are laid out to dry, and planks are laid down along them in various directions, to enable the persons who have the care of the fish to traverse them.... and in a populous cove or harbour the whole neighbourhood of the houses is surrounded by these flakes, beneath whose umbrageous and odoriferous shade is frequently to be found the only track from one house to the other (1993, 100-01)

In the forty years since the demise of the salt fishery, the flakes have disappeared from those same landscapes to such an extent that one literally cannot tell they were ever there.

Boughs and a number of other materials were used for drying fish on the flakes (figure 4.7). Spruce boughs were used and held in place by loose longers laid over them in such a way as to create rows on the flake on which to lay fish. These were sometimes called "lists," (Mary Ann Martin, MF-1) or "panes" and are visible in figure 4.7 (Miller 1979, 14).

We'd go in the woods in the spring and cut a truckload of boughs, cut the limbs off of the tree and put that on our flake and the leaves used to drop off and leave the dry boughs there ... spruce boughs -- we'd spread the fish on those boughs -- keep it off the longer and the wind used to blow up underneath it, used to dry the fish (NFM-35/36/37)

Laura Whiffen also noted that boughs had to be dried for waterhorse fish. Green sappy boughs might potentially stick to and leave a residue on the fish. "You wouldn't put waterhorse fish on no green boughs-" (MF-14/15). William Wells of Change Islands wove his boughs through the loose "lungers" that defined the lists and left them there to "fry" and lose their needles in preparation for the laying of fish (Budgeil 1979, 6). Figure 4.7 above depicts pickled waterhorse fish on a flake in New Bonaventure, in Trinity Bay in the late 1970s. The fish is lying on boughs that still have their needles (which had turned red with drying in the original colour photo). In other places in figure 4.7 most of the boughs are thicker and have few if any needles and the boughs are held down by the longers that define the lists. These slightly thicker boughs served to elevate the fish and allow more wind and breeze to get around the fish. The boughs with needles protected the delicate waterhorse from the rougher boughs and hot or less airy longers.

As fish dried, it became more resilient to contact and heat and could be laid on these rougher surfaces without much risk. The photograph also provides a sense of how high flakes could be built. A fall or slip through the longers of one of these could "bring you up" as Bennett March relates a little wryly:

I remember walking, going down between the longers on the ones [flakes] that we had -- *and that would wake you up* [laughter] -- if you were a little bit on the sleepy side, once your foot would go down between that and you'd bring up.... I really haven't got that much use for them. (NFM-30)

Women and men brought waterhorse fish up and onto dry boughs generally

**Figure 4.7: Waterhorse fish drying on end of flake nearest water,
New Bonaventure.
(Photo courtesy of Brian Miller and
Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive)**



at a certain spot on the flake reserved for fish at this stage in its drying. Laura Whiffen described this spot as being the likeliest to receive wind and also near the edge of the flake closest to the water where it was likely to remain the coolest. Again, figure 4.7 depicts this arrangement.

Waterhorse fish were laid out flat and placed carefully in their lists or panes. In their green state, rough handling or sloppy placement could damage the fish. Figure 1.2 illustrates one such list. Note the pattern of spreading -- heads and tails -- this allowed more fish to be spread. Note also how close the fish is spread to the edge of the seaward side of the flake. Care has been taken, with one exception, to lay the fish "fair in the list" as Mary Ann Martin describes below. None of the fish in this list have been laid directly onto an un-boughed longer (in this photograph the method of layering boughs is also clear).

Mary Ann Martin recalled the careful spreading of waterhorse fish and how her parents and grandparents did not allow the children to do much of this painstaking work because they were not careful enough:

Then when they'd wash out that [fish] after a few days they'd bring it out then on those hand barrels, used to call it, and take it up on the flake with - flake was a nice little bit from the salt house and then they'd just put it in on the flake for overnight and in the morning then they'd go spread it all out you know on- and they had boughs all over .. the flake. And they had like longers going out through like that [gestures] like made up -- lists they used to call it.

this is what the older people [said] -- "Now put it right fair in the list" 'cause [if] the fish wasn't all stretched flat you know ... [then] it wouldn't dry [properly] and be twist up. It [had to] ... be all flat ... right flat.... the flake was made out of longers you know, and then those longers put through in- like- like drills you'd see in a farm....

Well sometimes we'd [children] go with her, not very often because we

wouldn't be as particular as she would be, you know, 'cause she understood it more than we did. But if we got it down, that was it, you know, you'd be flicking it from one side to the other, but she didn't- she wouldn't have that! If you'd break a fish or break the tail of it or the side or anything,

MF: So she'd be doing it almost all by herself, would she?

MAM: Oh yes -- she wouldn't have us in her way.

MF: So she'd keep both flakes going herself?

MAM: Oh yes! (MF-1)

As mentioned previously, waterhorse fish was spread carefully on its back on its first days of drying out. Spreading fish on its face during the drying time of day at this early stage could lead to it breaking apart along its sound bone (MF-14/15). When it became drier and stiffer, the backs of the fish were then also turned up to the sun. During the nights at this stage of the process, fish were at first singly turned over, face down and their skins formed a protective layer from the elements. With progressive drying, fish began to be piled in the evening into what were called faggots which increased in size as time went by (figure 4.1). These faggots were like the waterhorse pile that facilitated the draining of the fish just after the salt was washed out of it. The faggots were constructed with their first tier back-down and the rest of the tiers back-up and fish was laid heads and tails on each tier. The pile tapered up to a single fish as it rose and this last fish was generally a larger one and formed the top overlapping shingle of the faggot. The shingling effect served to keep water out of the pile (MF-14/15; Anspach 1827, 436). If the weather was good in the morning, the faggots would be spread again.

Drying techniques for fish appear at first glance to have been a simple set of spreadings and pilings to keep fish safe and to keep it drying. Drying was, however, characterised by a good number of subtleties and peculiarities of process and technique. For example, in the first week or so of drying it was better to have good drying days spread over that period rather than consecutive ones, so that for an interspersed day or two the fish could be put in faggots to press out or "sweat" - that is, have water forced gently out of them. (NFM-30; NFM-35/36/37; Anspach 1827, 437). Bennett March's family would pile their fish on the third day regardless of the weather in order to let it sweat before the sun crusted it over and sealed moisture in (NFM-30).

At a certain stage, usually after a week or so, with four or five good days of drying (with the odd day or two of "sweating"), fish would go into either very large faggots or more usually what were simply called "round piles" to "work." These piles were described as being a foot or two in height, sometimes a little higher if a pressing effect was desired. They were three or four feet in diameter, and contained, according to Wilson Hayward, up to about three quintals of fish (MF-14/15; NFM-35/36/37; Warren 1979, 56-7). Their shape was said to resemble round "hay stacks" or "hay Cockes" (Anspach 1827, 437; Bulgin 1978, 96; Downing 1676; Warren 1979, 56-7). A good deal of skill was required to make and then cover a solid weather-resistant pile of fish with rinds (Budgell 1979, 9; Devine 1990, 22; MF-14/15).¹⁵

¹⁵Rinds were fir-tree lengths of bark peeled completely off and used to cover piles of fish a few days along in the drying process. Wilson Hayward describes the collection and use of them:

Early in the spring, before the fishery was started, when the weather get good, you know -- you get aboard your boat, you go across the bay, into the coves up there ... you wouldn't go in.

In his initial summary of making pickled fish, Wilson Hayward described this piling process as a flattening of the fish, implying that more moisture was being taken from them. At another point he also described the "working" of fish in the round pile as a "seasoning" and a "toughening up" (NFM-35/36/37). Laura Whiffen explained that the purpose of the round piling was to allow the fish to "work ... to get good." MacPherson describes piling as having two beneficial effects: first it forced water out of the fish which was then dried off with the next spreading. It also gave the face of the fish a smooth or "even" surface (1935, 40-1).

The first time the fish was round-piled, it would stay in the pile for a good while, approximately a week. Then they would "open the pile" and spread the fish for a day, putting it back into its round pile in the evening. It would stay in that second round pile a certain length of time (based of course on how the fish was drying, but possibly three or four days), be spread again, potentially piled again and so on. Each piling would gently press more water out of the fish. It would "sweat" and the spreading would dry that moisture up (MF-14/15).

March -- or April -- perhaps in May month -- you wouldn't go in March or April because a lot of ice used to be around and you wouldn't know when the wind was gonna go to the north and ice and block you up there. But you'd watch the weather, you watch the seasons and that, and you go and get your rinds.

We used go in the bay, get aboard the boat, go across the bay ... where lots of fir trees was to, and we'd take the axe and we'd shim it down -- we have a shim ... made out of wood, we take off the rind [a peeling off]. And we roll them up, tie them up, put them in our boat and bring them across and the next day then, we take it out, and we spread it out, spread it right down. One layer that way, another layer that way, and we put rocks on them then, pressed right out, and over the summer they'd dry out then, we used to cover up our fish with that ... [they could use ones they cut in spring that same summer] ... we use them for four or five years perhaps - - we used to have [roofing] felt and that too, but felt used to be hot. When the sun be shining, if you have fish in piles ... the ... felt used to be hot, now the rinds ... that would be cooler -- it wouldn't be hot so the fish wouldn't burn underneath. (NFM-35/36/37)

At a certain point the fish would be dried to the satisfaction of the shore skipper and her crew. This would be judged by look and texture. Most people described the effect of salt coming out of the fish onto its surface leaving a "floury" appearance but no actual residue that could be brushed off (Budgell 1979, 11).¹⁶ Fish could then be shifted off the flake and into the store until it was possible to ship it. If that shipping was not for a few days or more, then before the final shipment the crew might take it out of the store and spread it one more time to give it a touch of drying or "colour them up" (as Budgell put it), for the culling or grading session that preceded its sale (1979, 11; also Anspach 1827, 441; MF-14/15; MF-1).

This technique of colouring the fish up (particularly in places where fish was held in stores until the end of the season¹⁷) was the last technique applied to the fish before it was shipped to the merchant. The length of the drying phase could be anywhere from two to three and even six weeks depending on the weather. Frost claimed fish could go from salt to dried in twelve days with constant attention and hard work (Frost 1979, 21). This seems a little on the brief side but possible with excellent weather and a cure tending a little to the greener side. Willie John Randell of Bonavista stated that drying in average weather would take around two weeks (personal communication, 1995). In 1676 Downing described a drying process nearly identical to that pieced together here from memories of the 1930s to the 1950s. If one adds up the number of days, the

¹⁶How a pickled or light-salted fish looked when it was "done" drying depended on what degree of dryness was required or requested by the merchant and his export market in a given year

¹⁷As in Grates Cove -- see MF-1.

drying period in his description lasted three to four weeks (See appendix 2). Anspach's description echoes Downing's and the makers' of Bonavista (1827, 435-37). His drying times also range from just under three to four weeks. Different lengths of time might reflect i) the requirement of softer and harder cures demanded by different markets at different times, and ii) variations over the centuries in the reliability and quality of transportation. The less reliable and less dry the ocean-going vessels that carried fish to markets in Europe and the Caribbean, the harder and drier the salt fish required.

From the moment waterhorse fish arrived on the flake, continual attention was required to assess the fish and weather -- a variable beyond their control. The shore skipper would constantly make judgements about whether they should move the fish on from one stage of the processing to the next, taking into consideration the weather, the people available, the amount and state of the fish at various different stages in the drying process on the flake and in the store. This attention and resulting adjustments were critical to the quality of the final product. It was particularly important for pickled fish due to its extremely light salting and its higher water content (as compared with dry-salted fish). Pickled fish often required a longer and more involved making (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 48-9). With passable weather, their own forecasting abilities, their skills in drying and their knowledge of salt fish, good fish makers could produce high quality salt fish through the summer and fall. They had an intimate understanding of how fish dried and needed to be handled, how it behaved in different weather conditions at different points in the drying process, what the dangers were that threatened it, and how to ward off those threats to its quality.

4.3 Threats to Fish Making

The biggest threat to drying salt fish was inappropriate weather. Bad damp weather could delay the waterhorse fish from getting out on the flake and in later stages it could drastically interrupt the drying schedule causing a number of problems. In the previous section I discussed the possibility of slime becoming a problem when waterhorse fish was stored in a fish stage for too long due to bad weather. As well there was the possibility of flies spitting on the top of waterhorse piles which could result in maggotty fish. In the later stages of drying, bad weather continued to be of concern because a fungus condition called "dun" could set in (MacPherson 1935, 45). Dried fish dampened by rain was still at risk of becoming maggotty from fly spits. Extremely fine weather could also be problematic, especially when fish was in the waterhorse stage.

When warm damp or wet weather struck in the midst of drying fish in round piles, fish could only be left so long without there being a good chance that a number of conditions such as dun might set in. Laura Whiffen described how this condition was avoided:

MF: Did you worry about them being too long in the pile?

LW: Well, we'd worry sometimes if it would be too long...

MF: Someone told me about something called packing fish or packing.

LW: Packing, yeah. We used to pack back our pile of fish ... If we couldn't get it out, we'd go down and we'd pack back our fish. Pack it in piles.

MF: So what was that- what would you do when you did that.

LW: That'd do it good, we'll say, it wouldn't be snugged together, it'd be more open when we'd put it back eh -- it wouldn't be stuck on together.

MF: Ok, so you'd just [LW: Yes.] take it out of the pile.

LW: And put it in another one, yeah, pack it back. [MF: and just do it again. Ok]

MF: And that would get some air at it.

LW: Get air to it -- yeah.

DW: That improved the pile.

MF: ... And that was if it was wet for a long period of time?

LW: That's right yeah. (MF-14/15)

Her daughter, Vera Ryder along with her husband, Jabez, described one particular rainy summer when she and her sisters-in-law packed back fish nearly every day. In doing so, Vera and Jabez describe dun fish, touch on fly spits, and finally discuss the hard work that women had to do:

VR: So we used to bring the fish -- bring the fish up on the flake, we'd do the fish, and sometimes -- one summer it was raining all one summer -- we couldn't make the fish and we had to pack it all down the flake. We were there packing fish so's it wouldn't get spoiled. People had a lot of bad fish. Moira, Jabe's sister -- I didn't understand it -- but she did, she knew what to do with it. So she'd be packing it all the summer and we had no bad fish. Used to do it good see, take it up.... the air gets through it eh.... well [they'd pack fish] perhaps once a day. You go out and look at it, and if you see it getting spoiled, you scrub it, you see dun getting on it or anything, you scrub it. You scrub it off, 'cause you take them [bad fish] out, you know? ... That summer was bad ... you couldn't hardly make no fish.

MF: Now what's dun now? What is dun fish?

VR: Dun is bad ...

JR.: It's bad boy; spotty eh.

MF: Spotty?

JR: Mm-mmm.

VR: [continues] it gets something on it, it grows on it you know.

MF: What colour are the spots?

VR: Like brown sort of you know ... bad see.

MF: And you'd scrub that with a cloth or something ...

VR: Yeah a brush, you'd get a brush and water ... and put salt in the water.... dry it again, it'd be all right then.... Its like spits -- maybe you was going to put the fish on the flake ... get fly spits in it ... You gets fly spits in the fish -- you have to go get salt water then. Sometimes you put your fish on your flake, it's a real hot day, wasn't it Jab? Perhaps it'd be all fly spits, or nearly all of it wasn't it? Then you had to go and get the salt water and put it on to kill those maggots and try to cure it. It's hard work ... I'm telling you.

MF: And that ... the women were doing that ...

VR: Oh yeah, the women would do that ...

JR: They had it worsen- (MF-4/5)

Packing back fish was employed either for fish in round piles on the flake or for fish that had already been made and was waiting in the fish store for shipping. As noted, it aired (dried) fish out and kept the dun at a minimum. Various fish makers, including Vera Ryder, spoke of combatting dun with scrubblings and washings while others, including Heber John Keel, stated that once dun had set in, there was little you could do to remove the little spots that formed in the flesh. Either way the condition lowered the grade of the fish when it was culled, so it did not fetch a great price when graded. Dun fish was very likely to

be culled as "West Indie" and shipped to those markets in the Caribbean. When the dun was not too bad, the other alternative was to use the fish for home consumption (Anspach 1827, 441).

Once the waterhorse fish got out onto the flake for the first few days, a small amount of rain was less of a problem to that fish than hot, sunny, still days. Once a certain level of dryness had been achieved, faggots would be covered by rinds overnight and the more diligent fish makers would be careful to ensure that no rain got on the "face of the spread fish," as the following discussion with Laura Whiffen and her son Doug describes.

DW: Mom and them get it out of the rain, or any- if they did get some rain, like I said, it didn't rain that much as, and if you got your rain they were- [LW: You'd double it up] run and double their fish.

LW: Double up our fish on the flake ... You know, put two in two and three, like that [makes gesture] ...

MF: The waterhorse fish you're talking about?

LW/DW: Yeah, yeah, yeah right.

MF: If there was a dwigh or whatever ... [LW: Yes, yeah]

DW: Yeah, if it [fish] was a little bit on the dry side eh.

LW: My. Poor Mom. Pap would eat- Pap would be eating his dinner, *he wouldn't go*. [DW: No.] He'd- boy- he eats his dinner: "I won't go!" "Why don't you go get the fish Joe?" ... Mam'd run and take up the fish ... Well he wouldn't.

MF: [interrupting] And she would double it up [LW: yes] just if there was a shower

LW: Yeah, so fish wouldn't get it on the face, yeah

MF: He- he couldn't be bothered, but she was more whatever about it.

LW: Yeah, yes, right.

DW: She didn't want no rain on the fish eh, but a little rain didn't hurt fish - rain, them summers it didn't hurt fish because, well, in lots of cases, it was only a shower. (MF-14/15)

This excerpt indicates again, that in the making of fish, women frequently took the greater part of the responsibility for it. But in many cases everyone would pitch in, knowing that the quality of their fish could make a great deal of difference to their earnings and standard of living in the coming year. This quick work was only required in times of the sudden rain showers known as "dwichs" (NMF-35/36/37; Devine 1990, 23). Everyone -- women, men and children -- rushed to "scrabble up" the fish (Anspach 1827, 437-8).

Another threat to the quality of the fish was flies. Especially in the summer months flies would "spit" on fish, laying eggs which turned into maggots that ate the flesh of the fish. Usually after a few days of rain or dampness, fish makers had to watch out for any tiny maggots especially around the napes of the fish where the meat was thickest and therefore the least penetrated by salt. If maggots appeared, the technique employed to get rid of them was to wash the affected areas with a strong salt and water solution (MF-4/5). Depending on the severity of the "fly blows", as Stan Handrigan of Grand Bank called them, the whole load of fish might be washed completely over and waterhorsing begun again (NFM-44; also MF-17/18). This affected the quality of the look of the fish's face and as with sunburnt fish often fetched lower prices. If caught in time to preserve the fish, but too late to make its sale worthwhile, this fish was also kept for domestic

consumption (MF-6/7).

Hot still days were another major threat to salt fish, mainly in the waterhorse stage. The sun would literally burn or partially cook the fish, resulting in a condition called sunburn. It would then break apart as it continued drying and was prone to other problems. Bennett March described it well:

If you get the hot weather and you get it burned ... you get the sunburned fish when you get the really warm, the hot days in the summer with no wind or anything ... you get it out and you get it caught in that, you could end up with a lot of fish sunburned. And really all it is is cooked underneath the skin. And once it get sunburned then you could never make it ... the skin on the back of it always had a sticky- no matter how much you dried it, it always had a sticky feeling and it always leave your hands black ... A sunburned fish -- you could take hold to the fin that runs up the centre of the back and you lift it practically all out ... not worth the trouble of weighing it off. (NFM-30)

A key requirement for drying waterhorse was a cool and windy spot.¹⁸ Willie John Randell stated that people with flakes by the water tended to put their waterhorse fish on the areas of the flake nearest to the water. Breezes would be cooler there. For those without such beneficial flake locations, the area of the flake exposed to the most wind was chosen (Randell, personal communication, 1995; also Budgell 1979, 7).

In many communities around the island, shore crews would try to find some means to arrest the effects of sunburn. Some crews were careful not to carry freshly washed waterhorse fish out until after the heat of the day had passed (MF-14/15). Another simple method was to lay boughs over the fish in order to shade

¹⁸Budgell notes that the best drying weather was sunny with winds from the west and northwest. The worst were hot and humid days (1978, 95). William Wells stated, "The fish dried better if over the water and also didn't get sunburned so easily." One of his flakes was actually built out over the water (Budgell 1979, 6).

it to some extent (MF-2/3; MF-35/36/37). Many women had various kinds of sheeting or fabric to place over the fish to shade it even further. Laura Whiffen's mother-in-law used various materials including old quilts that she would hang from fence pickets that were wedged into the longers of the flake.

And I used to spread the fish and carry it up with Mother, Poor Mrs. Whiffen, we spread the fish. And sometimes, then when we'd get that out and that, it'd be hot, you know, there'd be some days it'd be real hot, so we had to cover over with -- perhaps we'd have old quilts or old somethings, you know and we'd stick up four pickets, like that -- put over it -- and the sun wouldn't burn the fish. The sun'd burn it see, yeah, split it abroad, yeah. Big thick fish, great big ones then, you know, not fish like it's going now ... big, great big fish yeah.

MF: And the sun would split them right down?

LW: Right down, if you didn't have something to shelter them.

MF: Would the pickets go right down to the ground?

LW: No up on the flake ... yeah, wedged up on the flake. 'Cause we had a tier of boughs over the flake, dry boughs, and they wouldn't go down through see. They'd have little short -- bout that high see, keep the quilt up on four ...

MF: Oh very small little pieces of wood?

LW: Yes, yes.

MF: And how big a quilt would it be?

LW: Oh, like you'd put over your bed ... that size.

MF: So that was just like an old quilt you had lying around?

LW: Yes right, yeah. (MF-14/15)

Bride Fitzgerald of Spillars Cove, only a few miles away from Bonavista,

was sceptical that anyone went to such a length, but it seems from other sources to have been a fairly widespread practice in one form or other. Lily Budgell wrote of a technique from Change Islands almost identical to the one used by Martha Whiffen (1979, 8), and Heber John Keel mentioned the concept of "damaged cotton" being used in relation to a poem about the salt fishery that he had read:

Old people used to call it damaged cotton -- stuff you could buy it in rolls eh, rolls, rolled up same as canvas only it was right thin stuff eh ... dark -- dark colour and it was damaged eh, pink here, blue somewhere else and you know ... old people used to call it damaged cotton -- and this is what ah, the merchant said "He should have used some cotton ..." [in poem style] to cover up the fish from the sun you see ... spread it over see? ... 'Cause I know my grandmother did down there. They had the boughs see, when they see it was getting warm, wind drop, they bough their fish over, put the boughs on top of the fish ... try to save it so ... so it wouldn't spoil eh ... but that was the killer -- it was the waterhorse ... not the real dry, it wouldn't hurt that, it was the waterhorse see? Wet when it came out (MF-2/3).

Sunburnt fish was not necessarily inedible and in fact some people liked its taste (MF-2/3). If it was salted correctly in the first place, it was fine for eating (MF-14/15). Many others kept it for their own tables, knowing that the condition of the sunburnt fish would only get the worst price if they tried to sell it (MF-6/7).

Finally, as noted, the entire process of cleaning, salting and drying a day's catch of fish using the pickling method took anywhere from two to six weeks, and if every step was carried out correctly and the weather was passably good then a high quality salt fish would result (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 47). The makers themselves and people in the community knew excellent fish -- the top-grade product -- when they saw and ate it. There was great satisfaction in producing near perfect fish -- the golden-amber hue of a well-dried, clean, thick,

perfectly split and with-a-little-flour-showing-on-its-face fish -- the Choice Spanish fish. What constituted such a fish is taken up in the next section as are some of the effects that resulted from errors in the cleaning, splitting, and drying of cod fish.

4.4 The Perfect Pickled Fish

In the light pickled class of fish most producers were striving to produce fish described above -- amber in hue, soft or doughy to handle and, when dried a little harder, that was showing salt as "floury" on the face¹⁹ of fish, a face that was smooth and dry to the eye and to the touch. These were very specific qualities and were described to me again and again. In the early 1930s, culling regulations and standards were set down for the various grades of fish. The top grade, "Choice (or Number One) Spanish" was characterized as follows: "Sound quality codfish, extra thick, light amber colour, even surface, thoroughly clean on both back and face, not showing blood stains, clots, liver, or gut; well split, and not showing excessive salt on the face" (MacPherson 1935, 12).

Pickled fish was known as Spanish fish after the lucrative market that most favoured them. Dry-salted fish were known as "Shore fish" (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 47). The commissioners note as well that Spanish fish was "extra thick, of an amber colour ... and only seven-eighths dry" (48). In my research I purposely asked people what in their minds constituted the "perfect" (pickled) fish. In the replies that I received a consensus emerged regarding such a fish's ideal criteria. Most described the standards outlined above. A perfect fish

¹⁹The face of the fish was the flesh side as opposed to the skin side.

had to be cut, gutted, headed, split, salted, washed and dried right. The following commentaries provide a sense of what such a fish would look like. Willie John Randell of Bonavista described it as follows:

Well, he was a nice -- between a yellow and white, you know what I mean, in between there somewhere, no blood on him, you know. No salt seen on him, split right down to the tail and split in the right place, you know, not cut off ... not split too high eh, not split too short (NFM-38/39)²⁸

In figure 3.8 the centre fish's sound bone has been split too high (towards the nape).

Mr. Bob Trimm of New Chelsea, Trinity Bay notes the floury effect (brought on by repeated pilings and spreadings) that was often cited as a characteristic of the perfectly salted fish:

... perfect fish was a fish was split right, salted right, dried right and he come out right ... he looked good, no joking about that -- salt would come out on him just like a little flour -- like you sprinkled a little flour and spread it over -- that's all the salt he'd have ... that would be showing on the face of the fish like ... oh boy it's a long time since all that.... perfect fish wouldn't be salty that's for sure -- he wouldn't be white -- he'd be more of a kind of yellowy colour.... if he was salty, the sun would bring the salt out on him -- West Indie! (NFM-34)

Wilson Hayward described the perfect fish in these terms:

Well, the perfect fish would be good clean, clean fish, the blood --all the blood took off of it you know, we used to scrape the blood off of it and that. And he'd be a nice colour nice you know, light yellow colour, and you could sit down and eat it without... you wouldn't have to cook it. We used to be on the flake lots of times, and pick the fins off it and eat it -- you know what I mean ... the salt was not that strong ... Of course you would strike bad weather sometimes -- you wash out a couple puncheons of

²⁸On one visit to Mr. Randell he took me out to his store and showed me some pickled fish that he described as being of excellent quality. They had the yellow cast described and the softer flexible quality of the "Choice" or "Spanish" pickled fish described above and below.

fish sometimes, put it out, you get a week of bad weather -- well that fish wouldn't make choice -- you know it would deteriorate and when the fish would be made well you'd get Madeira for it ... second class ... (NFM-35/36/37)

Weather was extremely important to the final quality of fish.

Melita Guy of Bonavista who worked as a child helping on the flake recalled a perfect fish in similar terms, but also described it in terms of its cooking and eating qualities -- a feature of a number of descriptions I was given by women.

You see a nice dry fish -- it's white looking. Not, not salt -- I don't mean that. But it's clean looking, and dry -- not dried right up like a board. But dried -- just right, perfect. You know it when you see it! You know?

MF: Yeah, yeah. And that would cook up really nicely

MG: That'd cook up -- you'd water it then and you'd cook up and, my son, it's worth eating, there's not nothing like it. (MF-17/18)

She drew attention to the softer quality of pickled Spanish fish, stating that excellent fish could not be too hard or too soft. Her description of its colour only hinted at the fact that it was not completely white, stating that it should not be too white. She also stated that too much salt on the face was not good and that the face had to be clean -- no blood and the like. She referred to the finished product being "flat," that where the sound bone was cut out the contour of the face had to be smooth. There could be no rise or bump on the face (MF-17/18).

Bride Fitzgerald of Spillars Cove noted that too much salt would show on a fish and its colour would be "too white" (MF-6/7). It is clear that the criteria for an excellent pickled fish were quite standard, from operation to operation, and location to location.

One exception to the consensus was Mary Ann Martin of Grates Cove, Trinity Bay who never worked full time at making fish. She described the perfect pickled fish as being "white as snow" (MF-1). There are a number of possible explanations for this anomalous description. One of the most likely was provided by Bennett March a fisherman from Brownsdale, just up the coast from Grates Cove, who asserted that from year to year, merchants often required slightly different amounts of drying applied to the fish. He described the differing results on the product as follows:

Depend on what the merchant was looking for that year ... whether it was a white cast with it or if he wanted it real hard or wanted it a little bit soft and with a greener cast ... but when it was really made hard it had a white cast. (NFM-30)

He distinguished two types of Spanish fish: one wetter that was dried just to the point before salt would begin to show on the face as the floury effect, and a hard dried type that did show the floury salt effect. Mary Ann Martin could have been remembering a harder dried style of Spanish fish. Further, she noted regarding Grates Cove in her time, that fish was picked up only once in a season, in the fall. A great deal of fish therefore had to be stored over lengthy periods of time by fishing operations, when it would be susceptible to various conditions such as dun. Given these factors, it seems possible that more isolated communities such as Grates Cove could have dried fish a little more fully in order to make them less prone to such problems while being stored for pick up.

Another point that was often mentioned regarding the finest quality of pickled fish was its thickness. In fact, the only distinction between the top grade (Choice fish) and "Number Two" or "Prime" fish outlined in MacPherson's report

was the degree of thickness (1935, 12). Mary Ann Martin described it in the following terms and then, like Melita Guy, described its cooking characteristics:

MAM: A nice uh, heavy fish like that, heavy fish

MF: So really- it will have to be a big fish to start with?

MAM: A big fish, yes, it'd be a big fish as big as that [gestures] and you'd cut it up in chunks and put it water and cook it. There'd be no steak beat that ... So nice to taste ... really good ...

MF: What would it look like before it went into the water -- what colour would it be for example, like a really good fish?

MAM: White as snow ... Yes white as snow.

MF: And was it really hard? Or was it bit- bit- bendy?

MAM: Yes it'd be hard before you'd cook it, but when it was watered it was nice ... Mother'd have it watered overnight, you know, and then fry out the scrunchions²¹ with that ... No times like it- for foo- nice food ... But the fish is different altogether now ... Tis not as big, tis not as fat, don't seem to be as nice as the fish then. (MF-1).

This brings out one of the key characteristics of the pickling method -- it made for very thick fish. This was caused by the fact that fish floated in brine while in salt. This lessened the amount of pressing out or flattening that occurred with fish dry-salted in bulks. It came out of its puncheons and butts and tubs substantially thicker and with a higher moisture content than its dry-salted counterparts. If drying conditions were good it made the thickest lightest salted fish possible, but it was always that much more difficult to dry. The Newfoundland Commission 1937 put it as follows:

²¹Scrunchions are, in this case, described as follows. "Fatback pork, cut into cubes, often fried and served as a garnish, esp over Fish and Brewis" (Story *et al.* 1990, 445).

The pickling method is the most successful in the production of the type of fish classified as Spanish. This process retains a thickness which is not easy to keep when fish is cured by the dry salt process. It also permits of a lower percentage of salt being used, with the result that fish when dried has the bright colour suitable for Spanish class. It requires much more skill and constant attention than is necessary in the case of the hard-dried light-salted fish, as the small percentage of salt used is not sufficient to prevent deterioration when any delay occurs in drying. In consequence a large amount of poorly-cured fish is inevitable when drying conditions are unfavourable for pickled fish. The system of pickling is not general throughout the island, and is mainly confined to those fishermen who have only moderate quantities of fish to handle in Bonavista and vicinity, Trinity and Conception Bays and the Southern Shore. (48-9)²²

Making Spanish fish was a risky undertaking although it was more financially rewarding if successfully completed. The fish makers of Bonavista and elsewhere were capable of making excellent fish except in the worst of drying weather. Bennett March recalled that when the merchants wanted a drier product there was more work in it for the fishing crews for less earnings. A draft (two quintals) of hard-dried Spanish fish would make "a great heap on the scale" in

²²Lewis Anspach was told in the early 1800s by Newfoundland sources that pickling cod fish originated with the American War of Independence when a severe shortage of salt and some profit-driven merchants in the community of Trinity combined to force planters from all over the Northeast Coast to ration salt (1810, n.p. (under heading "Query 13th"). Out of this unhappy set of circumstances it was said that a new lighter salting method came into existence. Ironically enough, in the long run the new cure got top grade for the fishermen and was heavier by the fish, due to higher water content, and so merchants generally paid for the short term avarice of a few of their kind. There is a possibility that a few details of the story were embellished to slant it in this almost moral way, if, in fact, the story was true at all (which it could very well be). On the other hand, pickling codfish was practised in almost the same manner in various other locations, including the Bay of Fundy, within seventy years (Perley 1852, 93-4). It might therefore be hasty to insist on a Trinity Bay origin for the process.

Interestingly, Anspach's texts indicate that pickled fish did not always fetch top grade. In his "Remarks" (1810, n.p.) and his *History of Newfoundland*, he notes that fish made by this method, though denser (and therefore requiring less fish to make up a quintal) and better looking due to thickness and colour, "will not so well stand the market as when salted in the usual way" (Anspach 1819, 434). The fact that fish continued to be made by this method 140 years later is testimony to the fact that either the technique for making it improved and/or that the market stood it well enough.

comparison to the wetter product (NFM-30).

These points further clarify the description of pickled fish, though the commissioners' comment above regarding the fishers having to cure only "moderate quantities of fish" is somewhat questionable. In fact, Bonavista, Grates Cove, and Sibleys Cove-Brownsdale (for three examples) were all remarkably good fishing grounds and their fishing operations produced large quantities of salt fish. One reason they managed to process large amounts of the labour intensive, pickled fish was that women were integrally involved in the curing. The requirement that pickled fish be taken out of salt in three to five days, and the need for careful attention during the complex drying stage, made women's contributions extremely important.²³

The commissioners also made an intriguing statement with regard to the colour of pickled fish being enhanced by light salting. Previous to that, they note that another cause of the colouring was that Newfoundland fish was not bled, unlike Icelandic fish which turned out much whiter. They state that for that particular era:

The objections to bleeding are, that in the case of large catches, particularly from traps, it is not practicable; that if the fish is to be cured as hard dry,

²³Con O'Brien stated that this distinct method was the difference between fish-making in Petty Harbour and Bay Bulls on the Southern Shore. In Petty Harbour they pickled fish and so women were the fish makers. In Bay Bulls (and elsewhere on the Southern Shore) they dry-salted fish and women were either not involved in drying it at all, or to a much more limited degree (MF-20/21). There is some truth in these statements, though my research suggests that women were still heavily involved drying fish *et al.* in many communities that dry-salted too (Bulgin 1978, 91; Rixon 1979, 12-13; Annie Tee (Burnt Cove), personal communication, 1995; Margaret Power (South East Bight), personal communication, 1994; Olive Pope (Grand Bank), personal communication, 1993; Freeman Randell (Williamsport), personal communication, 1995). As well, many women I met in Fogo where dry salting was practised also worked on the flakes.

light salted fish, it is not desirable that it be white in colour; and that the flavour of bled fish is inferior. (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 44-5)

It would seem that the market preference with regard to Spanish fish (and good quality light-salted fish, pickled or not) in this period favoured the amber cast (see also MacPherson 1935, 11).²⁴

Fish also had to be perfect in various other ways. Figures 4.8 and 3.8 depict salt fish that have been damaged in the cleaning process. In the first, the letter "A" indicates a blood stain that was caused by the fish being punctured by the fork of a pew (it was important to pew fish through the head when they were being pewed up onto the stage from the boat). The letter "B" indicates another blood stain left at the nape of the fish. Flies are crawling on the fish. Their effects have been outlined. In Figure 3.8 the centre fish has a stain left by liver at the nape (that was likely caused by a combination of incorrect cutting and gutting). The vin (or fin) bones were broken by improper heading of these fish, giving a ragged appearance to their napes. The lack of "whitenaping" of these fish has been noted above, as has the concept of the round-tail seen on one of the fish (almost out of the frame).

The conditions that affected salt fish -- sunburn, saltburn, dun, round-tails, broken vins *et al.* -- affected all classes of fish, not just pickled, and some classes were more prone than others to certain of these. Sunburn, for example, affected heavier salted fish especially. Con O'Brien stated this was one of the reasons that pickled fish could be dried all through the hottest days of the summer (generally in

²⁴On the other hand a number of fishermen described how for personal consumption their families would put away a quintal or two of bled fish in the fall largely because of its whiteness. In what era this practice began I am not sure, but it needs further investigation.

**Figure 4.8: Damaged salt fish on flake in New Bonaventure ("A" indicates a blood mark caused by the prong of a pew; "B" is blood left on the nape of the fish).
(Photo courtesy of Brian Miller and
Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive)**



July), while the classes of somewhat heavier salted fish, made in bulks, were generally not dried, in communities where this type of salting predominated, until early or mid-August (MF-20/21).²⁵ In chapter five I will examine the distinctions between classes of fish more fully.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the day-to-day work of drying salt cod fish on areas of the coast where inshore light-salting, and more specifically, the pickling of fish predominated. I have touched on many of the methods, techniques, skills, and know-how of fish making. I have demonstrated that the various stages involved in the drying process -- including washing pickled fish, piling waterhorse, and the extensive spreading and piling of the drying phase -- required tremendous amounts of traditional and complex knowledge. The work required much attention and many fine adjustments to the process in response to changing variables; most particularly the weather. I have tried to capture and evoke the qualities and quantities of this work in the descriptions and analyses above. I have also endeavoured to evoke a sense of how fish making and related tasks fit into the daily and seasonal regimens of activity in salt fishing communities.

Along with the many other tasks that had to be seen to in the course of the summer, catching, cleaning and making salt fish utterly engrossed the energies and time of the men and women who lived in that world. Their efforts demanded

²⁵Interestingly, Wilson Hayward stated that one of the benefits of pickling fish was that it could be made quickly in the spring and early summer and then get shipped to the merchants early, as well. This meant that members of pickled fish operations had a chance of paying off their winter and spring debts earlier in the season thus avoiding the extra price mark-up on the purchases of clients who owed on their accounts (personal communication, 1995).

remarkable endurance, physical toughness, tremendous commitment, and diligence at every step of the way. Making fish also required good coordination and decision-making skills. Their lives were not easy, by any means. For many weeks every summer there was little time for sleep, let alone leisure activities or relaxation²⁶ As Jabez Ryder put it: "Hard racket boy ... hard racket for a living -- and now -- you don't want to "move" for a living now" (MF-4/5).

The work, however, was not without its pleasures and rewards. Men and women were independent as far as their work schedules went -- a benefit that many appreciated a great deal. They decided upon their own courses of action and work from day to day. Though the regimen was incredibly busy, people were free for the most part to see to their own needs in their own time -- to get a meal, to look after their children, to care for the elderly, to tend their gardens and so forth. The work was varied and interesting enough, carried on out of doors during the pleasant summer season and clearly healthy from the standpoint of physical exercise. With good weather, hard work and know-how, large quantities of very fine and valuable salt cod were produced each year. This varied productive output and its challenges were satisfying for many people who worked in the salt fishery. They rightly took pride in their abilities and achievements. The complexity of their work can neither be denied nor dismissed as primitive or simple, despite the remarkable historical continuity in the techniques and traditions used for over three hundred years.

Many men and women I talked with have also highlighted the communal

²⁶See Downing 1676; Anspach 1827, 438-39; Devine 1990, 20-21; Porter 1993, 48; Rixon 1981, 13; MF-4/5; NFM-35/36/37; NFM-40/41.

nature of many tasks and attach a significant value to those times. Communal work in the salt fishery, on the flakes and elsewhere, often involved everyone from very young children on up (Miller 1979, 3-4). There was the regular hauling of boats by men and women, the bait-seining expeditions, fish gathering and spreading bees at different times. The list goes on and these activities were all recalled fondly. For many, the work provided a sense of community -- a sense that where they lived were stable, comfortable, safe and frequently pleasurable places (Bulgin 1978, 95; Devine 1990; MF-17/18; MF-1; NFM-35/36/37; Russell 1971, 2).

Equally undeniable is the complex and profound contribution that women made to the shore work of the inshore salt fisheries of the east coast of this island. Equal partners in the cleaning, splitting and salting phases of processing, and frequently solely responsible for and in charge of the washing and drying phase, women were integral to the fishing economy of the family, the communities, the Dominion and later the province. Their diligence and commitment to this work was all the more remarkable given the tremendous range of non-fishery related tasks and responsibilities they also had to contend with on a daily, seasonal and yearly basis.

Working at the fish on the flakes was not necessarily viewed by the women who did it as purely slavish drudgery. For many women, it was challenging and interesting work. It developed a sense of identity and self-worth and it provided regular and positive social interaction for the women involved (Laura Whiffen, personal communication, 1995; also Antler 1977; MF-1; MF-14/15; Millais 1907, 144-45; Neis 1993, 194; Russell 1971, 23). As so many I met pointed out, the

women of outport Newfoundland took on "more than 50%" of the work. Their contribution and abilities are certainly worthy of the esteem and even "awe" they inspired in so many men and women who witnessed their work (Porter 1993, 48).

The people of the salt fishery were intimately connected with a way of life profoundly in tune with once stable seasonal cycles of their work, patterns of nature and creatures of the sea. With each spring and the return of the caplin and the cod came the bustling fullness of the work ahead and a sense of certainty and well-being - a sense remarked on by many and eloquently captured by Wilson Hayward:

We used to move down to our summer home, down by our flakes and stages and that, you know down by the sea shore and beautiful evenings in the summer we'd be out on the bank, after we'd come in from fishing in the day, and get washed up, and get our supper, we'd go out on the bank, no caplin around nowhere. By and by you'd see a breach of caplin coming up from what they called Clarke's Point. They'd be breaching on the water, then you'd see a fish jump out of water. The fish would be coming with the caplin.

They'd come up, they'd come in Red Cove and they wouldn't come to the shore that night, 'cause maybe the water'd be too high ... and the old fellows -- "Here boy, we got to go in and get a good nap -- we wants to be early tomorrow morning." Get up the next morning, the caplin'd be rolling from one end of the beach to the other and just off the shore out in 3 and 4 fathoms of water, you'd see a fish jump out of water, after the caplin ... perhaps 4 and 5 fish jump the one time, you know. You'd see the fish come with the caplin ... you get your tub of caplin then you go out and you catch your couple thousand pounds of fish and that, you come on in, then you go and you span your moorings for your traps and that ... after two weeks then after the caplin come, they take the load of caplin into them, full their bellies, they go on the bottom and they get so lazy they be there in the gulches and that -- you set your trap there, you have two and three weeks of excellent fishing -- every time you'd go to your trap, you get whatever you want -- whatever fish you want and you have a lot of it to give to your neighbours, you know. (NFM-35/36/37)

Other commentators have remarked on the powerful feelings of renewal and vitality that came with the work of the salt fishery despite its heavy demands (Devine 1990, 9-13, 20-21, 23; O'Flaherty 1995). The work and its results thus held an inherent dignity and value akin to the work of skilled craftspeople everywhere and of all eras. Fish makers, like craftspeople, in creating the products of their trades, engaged in the transformation that George Sturt described in his journals, and which I quoted in the introduction to this thesis:

At the very moment of change, when the effort actually comes off and has its effect -- this keeps the "peasant" more or less satisfied, but "superior" people never experience that satisfaction.

The moment of effectiveness, when skill is changing the raw material into the desired product is always worth "realising." It is momentous every time ... (1967, 879-80)

The shore-women and men of Bonavista carried out this vital transformation with remarkable ability and skill, however mundane or everyday it may have been or seemed to have been. Making light-salted fish (and particularly pickled fish) was the most complex and difficult of all the processes. Shore skippers had to make many complex judgements about when to move fish from one drying stage to the next in relation to any number of variables. They had to balance the very unpredictable weather with differing amounts of and sizes of fish, at different stages in the drying process, and often with limited crew to draw upon to carry out myriad tasks. The product that resulted from the hard and diligent work of making pickled fish commanded the best prices. I will explore why this was the case in the next chapter in explaining more fully the distinctions between the various types and classes of salt fish. I will discuss variation in practices and products within

and between classes of fish, communities and the effects on these of gear types. My focus will be on factors that affected the product itself, its quality and its subsequent value and price.

The positive character of living and producing quality fish in the world of the salt fishery, however, should not be over-emphasised or romanticised. Many looked (and look) on many aspects of this life as negative and frequently destructive - the unremitting and extremely harsh toil, the meagre earnings, the lack of education and employment alternatives, the precariousness of their subsistence and its attendant evils. Whether or not any of these negative realities had to exist to the degree that they did is another question (however moot it now appears).

To this point in the thesis I have established that the world of the salt fisheries was characterised by complex, labour-intensive, often unremitting toil. Despite this toil, the world and work of the salt cod fishery did provide certain satisfactions and status to the people who participated in it. The work had its interests and challenges and the communities were bustling, more or less stable places, with many beneficial and pleasurable elements in seasons and years when the fishery provided a good living. The materials presented in this chapter (and the previous) reflect many of these positive elements.

It is the seeming contradiction between the positive and negative realities of this world and the various portrayals of them that I want to explore in the concluding chapters of the thesis. In those discussions I will continue to focus on and to privilege the portrayals, the ideas and analyses of those people that lived and worked in the salt fishery as they have much to bring to a discussion of these

issues. But first the discussion of variations on making salt fish must be undertaken in the next chapter in order to establish the importance of the light-salted product of the inshore small-boat fishery to the overall industry and to Newfoundland.

Chapter 5. Variations on Making Fish.

So far I have focused my analysis on the emic description and presentation of the production of one particular variety of saltfish: pickled fish. The light-salted, inshore processing that it required had a specific geographic range and this method of making fish contributed only a portion of the island's total saltfish production. This class of fish was one of a complex range of light- and heavy-salted varieties of fish.

In this chapter I delve selectively into the complex range of variants and variations on making saltfish. Though I will continue to employ emic descriptions of variations in making fish and their distinctions, I will depart slightly from that approach and bring various other sources into the discussion to aid in the explanation of these complexities. My goal is to place the light-salted products of the inshore salt fishing communities in relation to other classes of saltfish, their production and markets. How did the two main classes of fish most important to the inshore fishing communities of the east coast of the island -- the light pickled described in the chapters above and light dry-salted fish -- fit into the structure of the salt fishery? I will demonstrate these products' relative importance and value in the overall industry. To do so I will consider variations in the production and product of saltfish from three standpoints.

First, variation existed on a micro level, from operation to operation and, likely, from community to community. With regard to pickled fish, this has been touched on at various points in the preceding two chapters -- different crews used different techniques at each and every step of the processing. I will show that such micro-variation was not intended to vary the final product: everyone followed more

or less standardized methods in order to arrive at a more or less standardized product -- the methods and resulting product had been developed and adhered to for literally hundreds of years.

The fish makers pursued specific characteristics of colour, look and quality in the making of the product in order to produce an ideal fish. I have examined what qualities applied to make a perfect pickled fish in chapter four. This clearly demonstrated that standard models for emulation existed and that all saltfish was made with these in the minds of the makers. Once completed and shipped to a merchant for sale, his "cullers" (fish graders) standardized the saltfish of individual operations still further by grading them.

Inshore salt fishing people were well aware of the importance of their product in the overall scheme of things. In their communities light-salted fish fetched the highest price and it is abundantly clear from chapters three and four that the women and men who made fish strove to make the best quality that they could. Below I will explore the reasons why light-salted fish was so (relatively) valuable. Essentially it was the highest quality fish available (by various objective standards), but its production demanded the most labour-intensive processing of all. and, as I have also shown, intrinsic to its production were literally hundreds of years of training and knowledge built into the complex set of techniques and work routines that were needed to make this type of saltfish. The men and women of the inshore salt fishing communities and operations were equal to these demanding tasks and turned out high quality fish.

Secondly, I am concerned with the various classes and sub-classes of light and heavy-salted fish. Different areas and the different modes of the fishery seem

to have specialised in making distinct variants of saltfish and these variants were determined mainly by the amounts of salt used on fish (and to some extent by the technique used to salt them). The major distinction was between light-salted and heavy-salted fish, but by this century a medium salting could also have been said to have existed, both in inshore and offshore salt fisheries.

Within the light-salted class, the two sub-cures noted above -- pickled and dry-salted fish -- existed. How these differed and were employed by different operations in various circumstances will be considered. It will become apparent that the level of salting applied to fish was fundamental to their value on the market. The lighter salting possible in the small-scale shore fishery produced a higher quality and more valuable fish -- however, the lighter the salting the more difficult, time-consuming and risky the process of making it became. This section will conclude with a basic outline of the classes of fish, their levels of salting and basic characteristics.

The third standpoint relates to one key factor in the inshore salt fishery that determined salting choices and methods and that was the effect of various inshore fishing gears. I will present a brief analysis of the relations between curing methods and fishing gear. In the case of the cod trap,¹ its widespread use and

¹The Newfoundland cod trap works along basic lines. It is a very large box (some had perimeters of 80 fathoms "on the round") made of fishing twine; it has four walls and a floor -- with a small, usually one-fathom, opening or doorway. From the land or a shoal, a very long straight net, known in most places as a leader, runs out into deeper water and in through the doorway of the trap a short distance. This leader's role, as the name suggests, is to lead fish into the trap. Though 'simple' in concept, their construction and use demand a great deal of expert skill and expert knowledge. If set well in their berths, they are capable of catching large quantities of fish at one haul -- tens of thousands of pounds.

In 1874 there were no traps recorded in the Newfoundland census, but by 1884 there were 4520 and, by 1921, there were 7,365 traps. The powerful capacity that the cod trap had for catching fish clearly had much to do with its rapid spread and use (Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries Association

tremendous capacity for catching large quantities of fish over a brief intense season each summer influenced inshore salt-fish production in many different fashions, motivating many crews to shift from light-salted techniques to heavier salting techniques, trading off quality for quantity. Other operations developed various strategies for maintaining light-salted methods for the most part and making use of surplus catch in various ways.

Again, the basic but significant point of all these discussions is that the light-salted hard-dried fish of the inshore communities were the most valuable of all saltfish and had for generations maintained a strong presence in the markets of southern Europe right up to the collapse of the salt fishery in the 1950s. The pickled fish of Bonavista (and elsewhere), the lightest salted of all, and objectively the best in quality, in fact, dominated the very lucrative Spanish market where it commanded the highest prices. Most inshore fishing operations worked to balance their efforts to produce the lightest salted fish possible while at the same time harvesting the maximum number of fish they could. Much of the discussion below focuses on how and why fishing operations made the micro-choices they did to process fish in certain ways. It is my contention that these (admittedly preliminary) examinations of some of the factors that affected people's curing preferences and the shifts that occurred in those can offer insights into the larger questions of how the salt fisheries developed and declined as they did through to the 1950s.

In this regard, the explanations and elaborations introduced in this chapter lead to a discussion of a number of significant bureaucratic and academic ideas

that I have encountered in my readings regarding the salt fishery of this century. First is the opinion that through the last decades of the 19th century and the early decades of this one (up to the 1930s) there was a decline in fish curing skills and commitment. This idea has been subscribed to by various interest groups and scholars (MacPherson 1935, 15-17; MacDonald 1987, 7; Ryan 1980, 50). It is related to the perception that the individual fish harvesting and processing operations of the inshore salt fishery were far too numerous and diffuse and therefore incapable of making a product that would conform to rigid standards. Taken together these two ideas helped lead to a characterization of the inshore salt fishery as being unable to compete with the heavy-salted industrial processing of various other countries and productive sectors despite the fact that the inshore product was objectively superior in quality (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 108-09).² Many have asserted that these factors and conditions were central to the eventual demise of the industry.

This depiction is unfair on a number of counts. In many communities around the island, for example, I believe it was not so much a question of decline

² This same Commission had this to say about the remarkable diffusion of small scale fish operations which they clearly see as problematic:

In all producing countries, except Newfoundland and Canada, we are advised that the process of curing is mainly conducted in large central establishments, and under, in some instances, fixed standards enforced by Government regulations. This is the exact opposite of the procedure in Newfoundland, where the curing is mainly in the hands of the individual fisherman, and is without any established standards of Government control. According to the Census returns of 1935, there are over 13,000 fishing rooms scattered around the whole of the coast line of Newfoundland and Labrador. (108)

Despite the lack of enforced standards -- a lack that was in no way the fault of fishing people -- on the next page of their report the commissioners admit that such large-scale "central establishments" were not capable of making fish of the same quality "as that produced at many of the small fishing rooms in other places" (109).

in curing skills as it was a conscious shift of production to less light-salted fish that gave rise to this perception.³ This arguably amounts to the same thing -- a decline in fish quality -- but there is an important difference: skills and labour were being applied to different aims and standards -- they were not necessarily in abeyance. I will challenge this contention below.

The main causes of the collapse of the salt fisheries lay elsewhere and were not due to supposed sloppy, negligent work habits and skills, nor due to a supposed lack of standards and resulting decline in quality that was supposedly inevitable, coming from an industry that had been stereotyped as backwards and primitive (Alexander 1977, 130-1). In regards to this I will explore some possible alternative explanations for the supposed decline in cures at the micro-level of inshore fishing operations. Evidence suggests that there was little decline and that any marginal decline was due to poor curing weather, market shifts or reflected conscious decisions and choices on the part of fishing operations to shift their styles of production to those that favoured quantity over quality. These decisions in turn often reflected shifts in mercantile strategies and other economic incentives and disincentives to the production of certain kinds of fish. I will conclude the chapter by relating these micro-production choices to a number of developments in the larger contexts of the salt-fish industry and Newfoundland political economy in this era.

³Such shifts might have and likely did occur in relation to various factors including the trap fishery's effects, and disincentives such as shrinking price differentials between lighter and heavier salted classes of fish.

5.1 Variations of Technique and Product.

It is clear that variations of processing and technique existed between the many operations that produced a given class of fish -- such variation has been outlined in the preceding chapters in relation to the class of pickled fish made in various communities including Bonavista. It could occur on an extremely localized basis, from one family's operation to the next. In a given community there were any number of ways to carry out the steps involved in processing (see, for example, Bulgin 1978, 86-7). Amounts of salt used, decisions regarding techniques of splitting and washing and drying were all potentially variable and affected to some degree the end products. The Newfoundland Commission of Enquiry Investigating the Seafisheries... of 1937 took a dim view of what they perceived to be arbitrary and widely varying sets of standards:

There is no one specific standard of process accepted by the fishermen and the demands of the market to which the fish is to be shipped, determine, in a large measure, the method and process of cure....

Dry salting is the method mostly in favour, but in certain localities pickling is practised to a very considerable extent....

These are the two methods of curing codfish for the Salt Codfish Industry. There are, however, variations of each method, some of which are as follows:

Washing before salting or pickling --

There are advocates both for washing and not washing, and there is a variety of methods for washing; some good, some indifferent and some bad.

Salting --

Some fishermen attempt to make very light salted fish, some medium

salted, and some heavy salted. Some men have small piles or bulks, some medium in size, others large high bulks; some men remove fish from pickle after a few days, others let the fish lie longer. Some men remove fish from salt bulk in ten days, others only after a much longer period has elapsed. Some men wash fish from salt bulk or pickle very carefully, washing each one individually; others wash them in large bulks. Some men are careful to remove all blood before or after salting, others do not take the trouble.

There is no standard of quality, nor of measure, in regard to salt used in the cure of codfish, and there is no one grade of salt which all men accept as being the proper grade. (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 45-6)

Some of these assertions may be valid but I contend that these variations in technique finally did not lead to wildly varying standards of product and in many cases were done for rational reasons. Other statements -- for example, those regarding variations in the amounts of salt used -- implied seemingly random, almost chaotic practices. I will demonstrate that this depiction is unfairly misleading. Still a number of the variations outlined above may have been arbitrary and could have led to a wide range of quality in finished product. Yet the materials of the last two chapters clearly demonstrate that the basic methods, steps, and techniques of making pickled fish were both widely practised and long-standing -- different fishing operations were generally aiming to produce a standard product by standardized methods, and this succeeded for the most part. This product was further standardized by a mercantile grading process that occurred upon sale of the product and divided fish into its various grades.⁴

As a result variation on the micro level was not great enough to affect

⁴Which is not to say that the standards of grading were often extremely chaotic and dubious and problematic in various ways -- subjects I take up in the next chapter (MacPherson 1935, 12; Newfoundland Commission 1937, 55).

overall standards of fish. Some of the singular or idiosyncratic methods of production could have been and were likely nearly as long-standing (that is, traditional) as the shared or common practices of fish making were, whether peculiar to a single operation, groups of them, or even to a particular community or group of communities.⁵ Over generations, fish processors developed their own methods, but these methods stayed within certain limits of technique in relation to the creation of a standard end product, quality salt fish, and were generally effected for justifiable reasons.⁶ I will briefly touch again on two prime examples from previous chapters: salting, and piling techniques. These will demonstrate clearly that such variation existed within known and conscious boundaries.

Various fishing people informed me that in the making of pickling fish different salters used greater or lesser amounts of salt based on a whole series of factors. But all salters were simultaneously aiming towards a "rule of thumb" standard. This standard was described in chapter three for pickling fish, but nearly all of the fish makers I talked with knew the ratios that applied to the various classes of fish they were involved in making, from the pickled to the most heavy-salted types, such as Labrador floater fish. These figures and those provided by

⁵At least one of the fishermen I interviewed on the south side of Trinity Bay, Bennett March, implied that variations in technique from community to community likely existed (as it did and does with all sorts of other processes and productive activities) though I did not pursue the issue with him (NFM-30). I strongly suspect that it is the case though and worth a study of its own.

⁶A continuum of variation in technique and methods applies to the production of many "traditional" objects. Idiosyncratic experimentation and resulting variation in the constructing or making of individual products were defined by clear limits. These limits were set by functionality and community aesthetics. David Taylor's analysis of boat-building in Winterton explores one community's "rules" and the limits that those could be extended in relation to the building of wooden inshore fishing boats (1982). Salt fish production was equally contained, though by very different constraints -- its functions, roles, and markets were of an altogether different order.

various documentary sources are very uniform (keeping in mind the variability of the hoghead).

So while salters within the same class of fish may have differed in the amounts of salt they used, that difference had to fall within limits within which a recognizable Spanish fish would result. Interestingly, many of these differences were conscious choices (as noted in chapter three). One crew salted a little heavier to ensure against the chances of bad weather. Another crew took a risk on lighter salted fish that, if the weather held, might be graded slightly higher, and saved salt into the bargain. Meantime the crew that salted heavily had very likely developed adjustments further on in the process that minimized the effects of the heavier salting, while the light-salting crew could take steps if caught out by poor weather. Finally both crews were endeavouring to make the same Spanish fish -- both crews were well aware that their fish would be graded on exactly the same criteria and attempted to produce to these specifications.

Similar considerations led to variations in piling techniques in different operations and communities. The following excerpt from a discussion with Laura and Doug Whiffen provides a sense of such variation *vis-à-vis* the early piling stages of the drying process.

DW: So you'd build up a faggot then, you'd build up a faggot, be about that wide [indicates width] depending on the size of the fish eh ...

MF: That was like a foot and a half, maybe a foot- 2 feet wide, and maybe a foot- two feet long-

DW: As you come up, you keep putting your fish that way -- some people have a faggot that high, more have them that high; they'd have around a foot high ... more or a little less-

LW: When they be's green you couldn't put too much, but when they get dry you could put more.

DW: I know. But people used to put it green till it'd press out eh?

LW: Yes yeah ...

DW: Some people had small faggots -- like I said. you know, it'd depend probably, you know, on the size of the fish, and people's minds and one thing and another. (MF-14/15)

A number of fishing people and a saltfish merchant I talked with made a point of stating that within the classes of fish, there was no range of different saltfish with unique characteristics (NFM-34; MF-20/21).⁷ This point is echoed by MacPherson in his 1935 report on the industry:

It was said that there were at least twenty-three types of dried codfish exported from Newfoundland, and there are about eleven countries consuming these exports. The producing fishermen do not set themselves to cure fish in twenty-three different ways. They set themselves to cure fish by salting it and drying it all in the same way, and it is very evident that the standards ought to be set by the nature of the fish and by the degree of perfection attained in the curing, and not by the number of markets. (12)

Fish in different classes -- light-salted shore fish, and the heavier salted fish -- of course, all had very different saltings (see table 5.1 below). Nevertheless there is some evidence to suggest that different sub-markets required slightly different specifications within the broader classes of fish (Alexander 1977, 75-6). In the section on the perfect pickled fish in chapter four (4.4) there is some discussion of

⁷Mind you, Con O'Brien, a salt fish merchant, also talked of variant techniques of production that existed in his home community of Bay Bulls for "turning" heavier salted fish into a seemingly lighter salted finished product by soaking it in sea water just before washing and drying (MF-20/21). This mainly helped to thicken the fish up. I came across this technique in at least one other location, in this case Bonavista (NFM-38/39).

this issue in relation to Mary Ann Martin's anomalous depiction of the perfect pickled fish. Bennett March explained that this might be accounted for by different degrees of drying required in different years. I would speculate that such degrees could be said to result in what amounts to sub-classes of Spanish fish -- one dried harder and with the floury effect, the other softer with little or no floury effect.⁸

5.2 The Classes of Salt Fish

In the era covered in this study, the 1920s to the 1950s, pickled fish, the lightest of all salted cures seems to have been peculiar to a stretch of coast running roughly north from Petty Harbour to the community of Bonavista.⁹ I turn briefly now to

⁸Alexander confirms this to a degree in *The Decay of Trade* (1977, 75). In this case though, it seems merchants directed fishing people in pickled fish areas to dry their fish harder in order for it to emulate shore fish dry-salted in bulks (the need for this shift came about with the loss of Spanish markets after the 1930s and the resulting shift of the pickled product into markets that were not accustomed to it).

⁹These estimates of the geographical limits of pickled fish processing come from numerous sources. The furthest south and east I have come across the technique is in Petty Harbour on the Southern Shore (Con O'Brien (MF-20-2)). The furthest north was on Gooseberry Island in Bonavista Bay from Ken Saunders who recalled his father using the technique in the inshore fishery there (personal communication, 1995). Two other people from nearby islands asserted that pickling was not the dominant mode. John Feltham, originally of Deer Island stated that from the 1930s dry light-salting predominated, though the odd puncheon of pickled fish was made for domestic consumption in the fall (personal communication, 1995). Larry Hiscock of Flat Island concurred with Feltham (personal communication, 1995).

Con O'Brien stated that only place he knew where pickled fish was made commercially on that shore was its northernmost community, Petty Harbour. From Petty Harbour north and around onto the southeast side of Conception Bay I have no data, but all my research (oral and documentary) indicates that pickling dominated the fishing communities right down around Conception Bay's North Shore, into Trinity Bay and right around to Bonavista proper. Not one person I spoke to on Fogo Island recalled the method and it is not mentioned as a method in the accounts from further north and west (e.g., Small 1979; Bulgin 1978). Fish making further south in Cape Freels also seems not to have used pickling techniques (Rixon, 1981). Another possible northerly limit is Salvage, Bonavista Bay, just south of the above mentioned islands of Bonavista North (Gordon Handcock, personal communication, 1995). These estimates are obviously crude and are meant to serve only as a starting

other classes of saltfish produced on other stretches of coast -- variation on a different order from that detailed above. My goal is to compare the two types of light-salted inshore fish, pickled and dry-salted, both between themselves as well as to the heavier salted classes, to provide an idea of how they all differed in quality and value.

It would appear at first glance that the class of fish produced varied on the basis of region. But while it might be possible that regional techniques (and results) existed these do not seem to have led to any particular or peculiar sub-grades of fish. Major variations did exist from area to area, but these appear to have been based in the modes and amounts of salting. It was these salting distinctions -- techniques and levels employed in the production of fish from these regions, rather than in micro-variations in a single style of curing that created these distinctions.(Alexander 1977, 75).¹⁰

place for inquiry. It is also difficult to know where and when pickling might have dominated before the advent of the cod trap and its new demands on the shore work of cleaning and drying. Interestingly enough this (admittedly vague) length of coast corresponds more or less with what was known as the "Old English Shore," that ran from Trepassey (considerably south of Petty Harbour) to the community of Bonavista. I claim this because it is clear that from the late 17th century that many English settlements had been established further north in Bonavista Bay proper, and by the 20th century, south from Petty Harbour, the original English fishing planters had been largely supplanted by Irish Catholic fishing families.

There might well be a connection between historical settlement patterns and fish-making technique, not to mention, contemporary patterns of socio-cultural activity. Where pickling dominated, for example, women clearly took very full and active roles in shore work, at least back to the late 18th century (Anspach 1810). Many such speculations may be worth following up, though I make no strong claims for them here. Further research is clearly necessary.

¹⁰It might be argued that this amounts to regional variation, but I would assert that it is not case. Wherever pickling was not practised in the inshore, light-salting in bulks was, resulting in only two distinct regional inshore styles. Dry-salted fish does seem to have had various sub-classes too, but these again do not seem to be based regionally. Other factors such as gear types (that were found everywhere) contributed to these variations. Distinctive weather patterns do seem to exist and have existed for distinct regions (the Northeast Coast from Bonavista North on down has and had less foggy weather than the Avalon Peninsula further south and east) and it might be possible to make a case for

In the light-salted grades of fish, there were two sub-classes: fish pickled in brine and fish dry salted in bulks, the latter method being the more prevalent. Here fish lay in bulks or pounds, covered in salt. The salt drew water out of the fish which ran off and drained away through the floor of the fishing or salting stage. The immediate effects of this technique, as noted above, was a greater pressing out of fish dried in bulks. The heavier the salting and the longer the time under that salt, the flatter the fish became. Dry salting was, in fact, the standard technique for both light and heavy-salted fish.

As noted in relation to pickled fish in the previous chapters, the two classes of light-salted fish required the most lengthy (as long as six weeks depending on the weather) and complex drying phase. The hard-dried fish that resulted kept better in hot climates than the softer, heavy-salted "bank" or "green" fish and fetched better prices when made successfully (Head 1976, 72). Its overall quality also played a key role in its popularity. Dr. N.L. MacPherson (a fisheries scientist) had this explanation in 1935 for light-salted fish's popularity:

The idea behind the production of these lightly salted fish is this: the fish have not to lie long in salt bulk, and it is intended, and very necessary that they should subsequently be dried to a low water content. This type of preservation gives a valuable product, and at the same time one which requires great care in the process of making because it is so perishable. Of all the saltfish types the light salted shore cure reverts back nearest to the original. When soaked in water it takes up a greater percentage of water than does the heavier salted article (1935, 8).

The reasons that light-salted fish was preferred in most markets becomes clearer.

the existence of regionally distinct salt fish -- whether or not conscious techniques played any role. Unfortunately, at this point, it would be very difficult to demonstrate this without the physical evidence of fish. It might still be possible to construct a case based on oral accounts and evidence.

In various respects its quality was objectively better than the heavier salted classes of fish.

Heavy-salted fish was historically produced by offshore fishing ships, and, later (in Newfoundland) in climates too cold and damp to allow for light-salted curing.¹¹ More salt was required to keep this fish from spoiling while awaiting opportunities to dry it. The early French fleets fished offshore, and developed what was known as the green fishery. Their ships, often at sea for months, salted their catch heavily and kept it in their holds until a full load was caught, at which point they returned to their home ports in France or to drying stations in the New World, where the entire load would be washed out and dried. Other nations with access to domestic sources of salt also carried out similar types of fisheries at different times in the history of the Newfoundland fishery. These nations eventually included England and Newfoundland itself.¹²

In Newfoundland, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, various interests developed fisheries based on heavier salted cures. The northern fisheries were prosecuted from shore and from schooners down on the Northern Peninsula and the Labrador. In the Labrador shore fisheries, short drying seasons and weather conditions did not always allow for the production of light-salted hard-dried fish of consistent quality and so they often relied on a heavier cure. The Floater fishery (a schooner fishery) operated on a basis similar to the green fishery

¹¹For example, the short season and rough and cold fall weather of much of the coast of Labrador, especially north from the north end of its South Coast.

¹²For a discussion of England's entry into and development of a banks fishery from 1714 on, see Head 1976, 72-4. For an extremely thorough discussion of the international cod fisheries see Innis 1954.

outlined above. These schooners fished down north for the summer and returned when their holds were full, usually in the early fall, to Newfoundland. Various arrangements were then made to have this fish dried; very often inshore fishing families would dry this fish on a piecework basis: a practice common around the island wherever small scale schooner fisheries operated (NFM-29; Margaret and Pius Power, personal communication, 1994).

Likewise, on the Grand Banks, fleets of large banking schooners fished at great distances from their home ports following huge schools of offshore fish. The schooners belonged to good-sized mercantile establishments. They carried crews of men who worked the water from smaller boats known as dories, using ground trawl gear.¹³ These fishermen filled their schooners' holds with medium to heavy-salted fish and returned to their home ports periodically, leaving the catch for shore crews of women, who also worked on a piecework basis, to hard dry.¹⁴

The higher concentration of salt present over a longer period in all of this fish drew out more water from it, and as a result acted as a retardant to spoiling agents. This allowed for shorter drying times than was necessary for more lightly salted fish. Heavy-salted fish from the Labrador Floater fishery required only a

¹³This incredibly demanding fishery has been written on fairly extensively by Andersen (1977, 1988) and Fizzard (1987).

¹⁴This deep sea fishery, also akin to the long-standing French banks fishery and to the New England schooner fishery, developed its own English-Newfoundland variant, as noted, in the early 18th century and a native Newfoundland one in the last third of the nineteenth century, when the Newfoundland Government offered subsidies for the building of fishing schooners. It prospered especially well on the South Coast of the island, out of communities such as Grand Bank, Burin and Belleoram due to their relatively ice-free harbours which allowed schooners access to fishing banks from early March to November. The history, economy, culture, catching and curing techniques and technologies are well documented (especially with respect to Grand Bank) in Fizzard 1987 and the ongoing work of Raoul Andersen (1988).

few days of good drying in order to be made. The resultant product, initially dried out more by salt, was then more difficult to dry further with sun and wind than was light-salted fish and it could not be dried to the same hardness (MacPherson 1935, 34). Another effect of the heavy-salting was a toughening of the fish. It could therefore take rougher handling of various kinds and was generally piled in much larger piles than light-salted bulk fish (MF-20/21; Kenneth Saunders, personal communication, 1995). These fish were of course the flattest of all, as well as the toughest to eat. It was also much more susceptible to the deterioration in quality caused by sunburn (as noted above). Light-salted fish therefore generally found markets in places with hotter climates and with somewhat greater economic advantages for example, the southern regions of Italy, Portugal and Spain, and, later, Brazil as opposed to the West Indies (Matthews 1988, 38).

The above outlines the most basic processing and quality distinctions between light and heavy-salted fish, but there was variation in the steps for making any particular class of fish. Historically, I believe that the two cures, light-salted, inshore fish (shore fish) and heavy-salted offshore fish were the two fundamental types. It was much later that some of the methods and modes of salt fishing outlined above (Newfoundland schooner fishery) developed a number of what might be called intermediate grades.

The closest to a medium-salted class in this century were Labrador shore fish and the Banking schooner fish. They achieved this grade while attempting, mind you, to create a grade of fish equal to the hard-dried shore cure fish of the inshore small-boat fishery (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 48). In the Northern

Peninsula and Labrador shore fishery -- the livyer and stationer¹⁵ -- medium amounts of salt were required to make fish due to the shorter drying seasons and weather conditions (amounts of salt required were slightly less than with the Banks fishery) (MacPherson 1935, 9-10). But both fisheries generally endeavoured to produce more lightly salted, hard-dried fish, as it fetched better prices. This was especially the case with stationer and livyer fisheries of the South Coast, the Straits of Belle Isle, the Northern Peninsula and much of the South Coast of Labrador, where weather conditions were a little better, allowing for more thorough drying.

To provide some indication of the level of salting implied by the range light to heavy-salting, it is important to develop some baseline measurements. These are based on the rule-of-thumb standards outlined above and in the section on salting in chapter three. As noted in chapter three, a standard rule of thumb for pickled fish was that one hoghead (approximately 50 gallons) of salt was required to salt fourteen quintals of fish (on average), that is fifty gallons salted 1568 lbs of dried fish or 5488 lb of wet fish. Converting down, then, approximately three and one-half gallons salted one quintal (112 pounds) of dried fish (or 392 pounds of wet fish).¹⁶ Converting up, seven hogheads of salt were sufficient to salt one hundred

¹⁵The stationer fishery was an inshore migrant fishery, based mainly out of Conception Bay. It began in earnest in the last third of the 18th century when the English gained access to the Northern Peninsula and Labrador and continued through to the 1950s. It was also a reflection of the fact that, even by this time, shore room for the inshore fishing operations was running short. Every spring, schooners carried fishing crews and families to various locations 'down north,' where they carried out an inshore fishery. The Livyer fishery was conducted by 'livyers,' the permanent residents of Labrador. On much of the coast, they were of mixed European and Native descent, and frequently were not solely engaged in cod fishing. The salmon fishery and fur-trapping in the winter were major commodity producing economic activities as well.

¹⁶That is, 3.5 gallons was put on 392 pounds fresh fish, that, when dried, yielded 112 pounds (or one quintal) of dried fish. This uses an average conversion factor from wet to dry fish of 3.5. Various fishermen I talked with used a conversion factor very near this. As noted in chapter three, these

quintals of fish (350 gallons of salt for 11,200 lb. of dried fish or 39,200 lb. of wet).

By comparison, Labrador Floater fish, perhaps the heaviest salted fish produced in Newfoundland, required one hogshead of salt for only six quintals of fish (50 gallons salted 672 lb. of dried fish or 2352 lb. of wet). Just over eight gallons of salt was required to make a quintal of Labrador fish. 16.7 hogsheads of salt, that is, 835 gallons of salt was required to make 100 quintals. It must also be remarked that these figures for Floater fish were based on MacPherson's estimate for the amount of salt required and this seems somewhat low in comparison to other estimates I have come across, including two that claimed one hogshead was sufficient for only four quintals of fish (Budgell 1979, 13; MacPherson 1935, 9-10; Warren 1979, 34-5).¹⁷

Table 5.1 on the following page provides a rough guide to the salting amounts for the various classes of fish made in Newfoundland in this century, in order from the lightest to the heaviest salted. While the various estimates for the different classes could be argued with (they are based mainly on MacPherson's estimates (1935)), the table as much as anything attempts to place the various classes in relation to each other on the basis of the salting required -- a key factor in determining their final value as salt fish.

calculations are very loose and imprecise. The use of this conversion factor could very likely become even less precise *vis-à-vis* pickled fish given that its was frequently not dried as hard as other types of fish.

¹⁷MacPherson explains the reasons for his estimates fully on pages 9-10. Warren's figure was strictly speaking for generic "heavy-salted fish," though she notes that fishermen in Labrador heavy-salted fish (1979, 35-6). It is worth noting that a number of men who were either Labrador Floatermen or very well acquainted with that fishery provided estimates that agree with MacPherson's (Kenneth Saunders, personal communication, 1995; John Feltham, personal communication, 1995).

¹⁸The figures in this table were culled from various sources, some mentioned above, but most are from MacPherson 1935, 9-10. As noted, from operation to operation, and salter to salter, the amounts would vary, but these figures provide an idea of how the cures stand in relation to one another. In column 3 (number of hogsheds per 100 quintals), some of my numbers differ slightly from MacPherson's, as the ratios were calculated mathematically, while he often slightly adjusts his ratios in relation to different factors. The last column has been completed for only two types of cure, based again on MacPherson, who spent a good deal of effort calculating and comparing these ratios for Shore and Labrador cures in order to contribute to the debates regarding the pluses and minuses of the light salted versus the heavy salted fishery (33-40).

¹⁹Based on Anspach who claimed that with pickling "a saving is made of near three upon every ten hogsheds of salt [compared with dry or kench salting]" (1827, 434). Devine states that one hogshedd will pickle 13 quintals of fish (1990, 20). These also correlate with figures provided by New Brunswick fish picklers to Perley (1852, 93-4; 163-64). There a half bushel to the quintal was used, which works out to about 1 hogshedd of salt for 12 quintals of fish or 8.33 hogsheds for 100 quintals. The greater amount of salt used there might have to do with larger fish and/or a warmer climate.

²⁰Anspach agrees (1827, 433) with MacPherson (1935, 8); Devine claims bulk fish takes less salt than pickled (1 hogshedd for 13 1/2 quintals), but I think that this must be a mistake. On the other hand, a number of credible fishers asserted that very light salted fish in bulks required one hogshedd for twelve quintals. MacPherson tends to be conservative regarding light-salted product (8).

²¹This is almost pure speculation based on MacPherson's assertion that American (and French) schooner fish was more heavily salted than Labrador fish. The figure is a very rough estimated based on a comparison of yields that he provides (1935, 39).

Table 5.1: Salting Estimates for Various Classes of Fish¹⁸

Cure Type		1 Hogshead salt for # quintals fish	# of Hogsheads salt for 100 quintals fish	Time in salt	% Weight of fish to salt to water
Light Salted	Pickled	1 for 14.3 ¹⁹	7 for 100	3-5 days	
	Dry salted	1 for 12 to 1 for 10 ²⁰	8.33 to 10 for 100	3-21 days	47.2 % fish 11.76% salt 41% water
	Dry salted (Trap fish)	1 for 8	12.5 for 100	3-8 weeks	
Medium (dry) salted	Straits/ S. Coast of Lab'd	1 for 7-8	13.5 for 100 (averaged)	4-8 weeks	
	Banks Schoon'r	1 for 6.5- 7.5	14.3 for 100	Length of trip	
Heavy (dry) salted	Lab'd shore (heavy)	1 for 6.25	16 for 100	6-8 weeks	35.3% fish 17.69% salt 47% water
	Lab'd Floater	1 for 6	16.7 for 100	Length of trip	
	U.S. Banker	1 for 4 ²¹	25 for 100	Length of trip	

Two points need to be made about the data in this table. In the light-salted class the first dry-salted sub-class clearly has a broad range of possible saltings and lengths of time in salt. This was the light-salted Shore fish, described above, that was made in bulks and that was second in quality only to pickled or Spanish fish. It was the predominant saltfish of the inshore and clearly the predominant product of all classes of the salt fishery.²² It was perhaps of all the classes the most varied in terms of production, partly due to its tremendous and widespread popularity. My sense though is that the seeming lack of standardisation within this class is slightly misleading.

It would appear that shore fish, a sub-class of light-salted fish broke down further still into its own light, medium, and heavy-salted classes (though the heaviest salted shore fish was likely equivalent to the medium-salted classes mentioned above). A number of sources distinguished between light-salted fish in bulks that stayed in salt anywhere from three to eight days and "heavy-salted" fish in bulks that stayed in fifteen to twenty-one days (Budgell 1979, 5; Bulgin 1978, 83; Warren 1979, 36).²³

The very light and briefly salted shore fish, as with pickled fish, was likely the highest quality fish -- the thickest and least salted and had the yellow cast of

²²Unfortunately census data does not differentiate between pickled Spanish and dry-salted Shore fish. Fairly precise estimates and comparisons could likely be calculated by summing the production of those communities that made pickled fish on the stretches of coast mentioned above. In 1921, Shore fish production on the island nearly tripled that of both the Labrador and the Banks fisheries. In 1911, it nearly doubled the other two. When one considers that a good deal of stationer and liver fish fisheries on the South Coast of Labrador was closer to Shore fish in both style of production and quality than the medium and heavy-salted fish of the schooner fisheries, these ratios become even larger.

²³John Feltham of Deer Island Bonavista Bay remembered light-salted Shore fish being in salt for a period ranging from three to twelve days (personal communication, 1995).

such fish. It, too, was also likely the most complex to make. If made well a lot more of it likely went for Number-One grade than its more heavily salted counterpart. William Brett of Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island distinguished between those operators who regularly made such fish and those who settled for more Number 2 grade fish (NFM-21/22). The latter group probably salted more heavily and left their fish in longer.

Still other people I talked with seemed as a rule to leave their fish in salt for approximately two to three weeks (MF-20/21; NFM-21/22; Pocius 1992, 92; Rixon 1981, 10). This fish was graded as shore fish along with the other lighter and more briefly salted class, but, as noted, was not likely of as high a quality. There may be a significant correlation here between this more heavily salted fish and the use of the cod trap, a fishing gear that allowed for very large catches in a very short period of time and I turn briefly to this question.

In table 5.1 above, in the light-salted section, the third sub-class is described as dry-salted trap fish. This fish required more salt because it stayed in its bulks longer. MacPherson asserted that this resulted from the "larger scale" on which the trap fishing crew worked (1935, 8). By the early 20th century the cod trap was widely established along all coasts of the island and in Labrador. Its ability to catch very large quantities of fish in the very short period of the caplin scull affected fish processing in many ways, and many solutions to handling the glut were organized.

In the intense six to eight week trap season, huge catches were possible twice and even three times a day. As outlined in chapter three, hauling, cleaning and getting this fish under salt was an extremely laborious process in and of itself,

never mind adding to it with the equally labour-intensive and continuous work of washing and drying. On top of this was the fact that on average, trap fish were smaller than fish caught in the hook and line fisheries, adding yet more work. One solution developed to deal with this harsh workload was a transferring of the green fisheries longstanding practice of heavier salting to shore fish and, in effect, trading quality for quantity.²⁴ The solution was a judgement call on the part of fish makers, for lower quality fish received a lower price by grade and by size.

Con O'Brien was referring to this heavier salted trap fish when he described how the fishers of Bay Bulls "re-thickened" the fish by soaking them for a length of time in sea water, before they washed and dried them (MF-20/21). This technique allowed them to put more fish in their bulks than they could have under normal light-salting conditions and still manage to receive shore-quality grades for fish that was not strictly of shore quality.

Con O'Brien also pointed out that because this heavier salted shore fish was more susceptible to sunburn it was not dried until early or mid-August. At this point the peak of the trap fishery was over and fishermen had more time to make fish. In fact, one of the main differences between making fish in Petty Harbour and Bay Bulls (both on the Southern Shore) was that in Petty Harbour where they made pickled fish women were more involved in the drying process (MF-20/21).

²⁴Putting it in terms of a basic trade-off may be an oversimplification. The work involved in maintaining very light-salted curing while prosecuting the trap fishery was a prodigious undertaking. It is debatable whether or not the average trap crew could have managed (or desired to manage) the harvesting, cleaning, and salting of so much fish and still found it possible to wash and dry top grade very light-salted product (if they even wanted to go to this extremely rigorous route). It is clear that many crews in Bonavista did it, but there they had a long and strong tradition of well-trained and incredibly tough women shore crews.

It is interesting to note that in relation to the discussion of the perfect pickled fish in chapter four, people who made this heavier salted shore cure frequently described the colour of a perfect dry-salted fish as being white versus amber or yellow.²⁵ This cast was undoubtedly induced by the heavier salting while very light-salted shore fish of the best quality (known as Merchantable) was meant to have "the characteristic yellow tinge" of the pickled fish (MacPherson 1935, 11).

In Bonavista another method for dealing with this glut was developed. Trap crews continued to pickle fish to the fullest extent possible and only when all of their puncheons and barrels were used and the crew was working to its limit, would other solutions be sought. One method was to put excess fish into generally relatively heavy-salted bulks. Since most crews did not have stages designed for bulks, these were often constructed on the spot, often out of doors -- for example, under flakes (NFM-35/36/37; NFM-38/39). One season Wilson Hayward's family operation used an old boat as a bulk, nailing a tar-paper lid over it when it was full (NFM-35/36/37). This fish could stay in these bulks for up to four months if necessary (Willie John Randell, personal communication, 1995).²⁶

It might be argued that with the added strain of so much more fish to handle, the overall quality of the fish that was being processed by the light-salted methods may also have suffered. Yet, it seems from my work on the Northeast Coast and particularly in Bonavista that by the mid-1920s a balance of sorts had

²⁵Two examples of such descriptions are found on i) NFM-18 (Bill Joy of Bay Bulls on the Southern Shore) and ii) NFM-21/22 (William Brett of Joe Batt's Arm, Fogo Island).

²⁶Mr Randell stated that a hogshhead of salt would salt between eight and ten quintals of such fish. This ranged depending on how long the crew expected it would be before they could get to it to wash and dry it.

been achieved between the demands of huge amounts of fish weighed off against the desire to process as much as possible. In Bonavista, trapping operations light salted (in their cases, by the pickling method) to the greatest degree possible, put whatever else they could handle into "salt bulk," bagged extra fish in cod bags for collection later, and gave a lot of fish away to handline crews (often in return for those crews' help putting away the trap crews' own catch and/or for favours returned later in the season). At other times, when no other alternatives were open to them, crews let fish go. Boat size, too, in conjunction with sea conditions also constrained their hauls. More importantly, it was equally clear to me that these crews, from long experience, knew more or less to the quintal, how much fish they could put away successfully in a day's worth of good hauls.²⁷ Salters knew how to adjust their amounts to pace the rate at which fish would be ready for spreading. To take more fish than they could handle was as good as wasting time, fish, and salt.

There is also no question that a major factor which allowed the trapping operations of pickled-fish communities to maintain the production of this light-salted high quality fish was the presence of their shore crews of women. These crews had made pickled fish for generations. There was very likely no group better suited on the entire island to take on the arduous demands and brutally hard work of cleaning and salting with the men and of washing and drying by themselves, the large volumes of pickled trap fish and light-salted bulk fish.

As well, it could be argued that other technological changes led to

²⁷For pickled fish in Bonavista, the rule of thumb was approximately twenty quintals a day -- ten in the morning's haul and ten in the evening's -- about 8,000 lb of round fish (fish that has not been cleaned -- head on, ungutted). Three fishermen confirmed this number independent of one another.

improvements in fish quality. The advent of the marine engine in the inshore fishery (circa 1910) no doubt improved the quality of salt fish. With engines fishermen were able to return more quickly and reliably to their stages with their catches than in the days of sail and oar. This speed was of the essence during the hot days of July when fish were glutted with caplin. As noted in chapter three, fish softened very quickly in these conditions and the sooner it was processed the better.

All of these considerations in addition to the fact that there were longstanding markets such as Italy for lighter-salted bulk fish do not diminish the fact that individual operations and different communities and regions could have and likely did make choices to produce more heavily salted and less labour-intensive fish when the opportunity to do so was made possible by the cod trap.

Even in Bonavista some trapping crews though maintaining pickling techniques made the decision to shift to heavier salted and/or lower quality production. Laura Whiffen recalled that some trap operations in Bonavista processed more fish on average than others (including the operation in which she worked). This was again a conscious choice to balance quantity against quality and endeavour to come out ahead financially. Her own crew continued in the older, more careful tradition of producing smaller amounts of higher quality fish as described earlier in chapter four. She stated that the fishermen of her operation were very careful to bring in only as much fish from their trap as they could handle in relation to maintaining such standards of quality.

Likewise, hook-and-line operations, generally constrained by smaller harvesting capacities continued the lighter salted production. Mary Ann Martin's

family made top quality, light-pickled, trawl fish right to the end of the salt fishery in Grates Cove (MF-1). This larger, thicker fish fetched the top grades in the culling process. Bride Fitzgerald's mother, the salter and fish maker of her family's hook-and-line operation in Spillars Cove, harboured a good deal of distaste for what she considered the inferior quality and laborious demands of trap fish. She complained bitterly one summer when her husband was given a few quintals of trap fish for helping a trap crew set their trap.

About 3 days he stayed in with them. So Mum- they used to give my father a couple quintals of fish eh ... Couple- perhaps- they had 1000s of fish And my mother said- my mother said, "Listen Dan," she said, "[if] you goes out there with Will Faulkner," she said, "don't you take no fish. 'Cause if you do," she says, "I'll throw it all over the bank. Because," she says, "it's not fit to make! 'Cause what fish you got out there," she says, "I don't know who's going to make that." It was too small to handle it -- little small fish ... Hard to make it, I don't know how they used to make it. I don't know.

MF: Why was it hard to make now?

BF: It was too small see?! You always- used to have so much for to put in a quintal of fish-

MF: Oh I see, you had so many fish-

BF: My dear! Oh my dear, I tell you. Well you only want a few big ones for a quintal of fish see? 'Cause some fish weighs 8 or 9 lbs -- but those little small ones -- it take a dozen of they before they weighed 10 lb. (MF-6/7)

This evidence and that of Laura Whiffen above demonstrates that, in Bonavista at least, decisions to shift to lower quality production that focused on increased volume were not made without a good deal of consideration and discussion, and

perhaps even debate. Again, such shifts seemed to have reflected conscious choices on the parts of individual operations and not all operations made the choice to go to these new styles of production.

Declines in quality might also have been further encouraged by the advent of *tal qual* purchasing in the shore fishery of the early 1900s that made the extra work of producing better quality saltfish nearly meaningless.²⁸ Mind you, Laura Whiffen felt that crews that made higher quality fish were to some extent penalized by mercantile grading practices as well (see chapter six), but certainly *tal qual* was more discouraging in this regard. By the mid to late 1920s the purchase of fish via grading was very much back in force in Bonavista and in most other places on the east coast.

Even during the short-lived period of *tal qual* in the inshore fishery (largely during World War I), good curing practices were not abruptly or seriously abandoned, despite the gloomy predictions and warnings from various official bodies including the Fisheries Protective Union. The following excerpts from two successive years (1917 and 1918) of their annual proceedings cast some doubt on the validity such alarmist pronouncements:

We all deplore the inferior cure of Shore fish this season, and we are more convinced than ever that the only remedy is a standard cull, as recommended by this Convention in 1909. (Coaker 1984, 123)

²⁸*Tal qual* purchasing was a mode that bypassed the grading of fish. A fishing crew's catch was bought at one price per quintal. It began in the late 19th century primarily in the Labrador fishery with buyers vying for crews' catches in the yearly cutthroat rush to buy and export fish to European markets. It eventually spread to the light-salted fisheries, especially during the lucrative years of the World War I. Needless to say, while it often upped the earnings of fishing crews, it led to disorderly marketing and curing practices, particularly in the heavy-salted fisheries (Ryan 1980, 50-51). It was also viewed as a disincentive to maintaining high quality fish production. Very few of the fishers I interviewed recalled this method of purchase being used in their times (from the mid-1920s onward).

I am pleased to find the cure of shore fish the past season greatly improved and far ahead of 1917 cure. Our collection of fish this season with but two or three exceptions was all that could be desired and the Northern settlements are to be congratulated upon the splendid shore cure of 1918.
(131)

These statements are similar in tone to other often alarmist claims that Newfoundland fish-making was in a long, continuous, and serious decline. MacPherson outlines a number of such claims from a various sources through the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1935, 15-16). His own final conclusion is that many such claims coincided with years when bad weather made curing difficult and worse fish was made, which was unquestionably a perennial problem of the inshore salt fishery (18). It had little to do with declining or inferior curing skills. I asked a good many of the oldest men and women I talked with if they recalled an ongoing decline of fish quality or fish-making skills in their time in the fishery. None of them had a recollection of such trends, very likely because no such trends existed (Wilson Hayward, personal communication, 1995; Laura Whiffen, personal communication, 1995).

MacPherson asserts in his discussion of this "problem" that Newfoundland curing skills and products remained stationary in relation to their quality, while other nations' products were better standardised and more reliable (16). He argued Newfoundland product needed more standardisation in order to compete with Icelandic *et al.* fish which was at the time usurping traditional Newfoundland markets yearly. He argued that a quality reliable product was necessary if Newfoundland was to stave off further losses of market share (which were most problematic in the heavy-salted classes of fish -- there was no comparable product

to compete with light-salted Spanish and Shore fish at the time) (14-18).

I agree with his contentions to an extent -- clearly some solution had to be found to cope with rainy damp seasons. These could significantly decrease the quality of a season's catch and helped to foster the sense that Newfoundland product was somewhat unreliable. But the solutions to this problem and others that affected the fishery on a similarly grand scale, should have been tackled by the Dominion's governments in conjunction with merchants and fishing people.²⁹ The two former interest groups were busy withdrawing from the industry, diversifying into more profitable ventures, and generally abdicating responsibility for the industry and its workers who had sustained the society for generations. They did this at a time when concerted efforts were most needed to maintain the industry's European markets and bring it through a series of crises resulting from unstable world economic circumstances both during and following the interwar years. One of these crises, the Spanish Civil War (which closed that nation's markets), particularly affected pickled-fish production (Alexander 1977, 75). If merchants and governments had been willing to invest in the industry through these crises, Newfoundland might have been able in the long run to avoid becoming dependent on one product, fresh-frozen cod, in one market -- the U.S.A.

This investment could have occurred on all sorts of levels and in all kinds of ways, from basic financial investment to less direct means, such as education and various infrastructure improvements for example. Such investment was not forthcoming to any great degree between 1900 and 1960 in any branch of the salt

²⁹Infrastructure development, fishery training and education, and the slow deterioration and decline of the overall physical plant of the salt fishery through the early decades of the 20th century were three such problems that required attention.

fisheries, despite the efforts of various interest groups including the Fishermen's Protective Union. The other main force working against such a re-directing was the fact of the intense labour demands of the light-salted fishery: the burdens of the work were rightly perceived as too onerous -- especially when other mechanized labour saving modes came on stream (Alexander 1977, 130-31). Though again, with committed encouragement, imagination, and investment could not this stumbling block to the inshore salt fishery have been overcome?

While I am not suggesting that the salt fisheries were ever likely to be remounted on the same scale and terms that they had been for many previous generations (or even that they should have been, given some of the historical conditions of the industry), I am asserting that a viable and productive niche for high quality light-salted fish was not, for example, out of the question. By the 1960s, market conditions, prices *et al.*, had improved markedly all over the world. With a bit of forethought and some committed orderly approaches to marketing and production, the Newfoundland fisheries could have developed a more stable and more diversified base.

Fishing people made good quality saltfish right to the very end of the salt fishery in the 1950s despite the remarkable toil and hardships of the day to day, year to year life and work in that world, despite the tremendous upheavals, dislocations, and impoverishment of the 1930s, and despite the long term large scale neglect and slow abandonment of the industry.³⁰ That they managed this throughout this era is testimony to the remarkable resilience and the long and

³⁰The details of this depressing, at times, tragic history of the long decline of an industry (and the nation (and later, province) built on it) have been developed by a number of scholars, notably Alexander 1977; Antler and Faris 1979; Iller 1993; MacDonald 1987.

strong traditions of small-scale production that characterized the work and craft of these workers.

With the collapse of the heavy-salted market and the weakening of the light-salted markets through the late 1940s and into the 1950s, the salt fishery as it had been conducted for centuries dwindled away.³¹ The new Canadian federal government had little to no interest in sustaining the salt fishery in general, and this included the light-salted inshore sector, perceiving it as archaic and impoverished -- "a primitive industry producing an obsolescent product" (Alexander 1977, 130). They wanted much more to invest in the fresh-frozen industrial initiatives despite the risks inherent to single-commodity export to a single market (130).

Artificial curing was well-established in Europe and common in the Maritimes, and in the 1950s the French, among others, were working on techniques to replicate Newfoundland's famous shore cure. With the expansion of the frozen fish trade, the introduction of Canadian social security payments, and after 1953 Nova Scotia bidding for Newfoundland saltbulk, the supply of labour for the backbreaking task of sun-drying began to disappear. Newfoundland's one competitive advantage in the saltfish trade was its light-salted fish, and if the supply of that dwindled, the trade had little future. (131)

William Brett recalled this era and the shift in Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island to the production in the local plant of fresh-frozen fish and their own production of heavy-salted, "salt-bulk" fish that they sold green to buyers from artificial drying plants. The labour involved was minor by comparison to the light-salted hard-drying methods and the price differential not too bad when one took

³¹This occurred for numerous complex reasons -- for the details see Alexander 1977, 101-157.

into account that green fish sold by the quintal was by comparison to light-salted so much heavier. This made up for the price especially in relation to the labour saved (NFM-21/22).³² Heavy-salted green fish now took the place of the so much more difficult to produce pickled and light-salted shore fish.

5.3 Conclusion

Until the rapid decline of a centuries-old industry in the space of barely twenty years, the significant fact of the salt fisheries of Newfoundland was the centrality and dominance of the light-salted, hard-dried, pickled and shore cures of those fisheries. These cures produced the highest quality fish and had been developed to satisfy the conditions of the hot climates of the historical English markets in southern Europe and the West Indies as well as remedying the English's early lack of secure access to salt supplies. As a result, they developed a small boat, inshore fishery that allowed fish to be landed quickly, lightly salted, and within a short period taken out onto flakes to let the wind and sun do the preserving work. Curing practices relied less on salt and more on the labour-intensive drying of the fish by shore crews described in the previous chapter. This created the internationally sought after light-salted hard-dried pickled and shore cures that Newfoundland remained famous for right up to the demise of the salt

³²While this may have been better for fishermen and fishing operations in general, it also had its decided down side. Industrial fish plants, whether producing artificially dried salt fish or frozen fish, paid terrible prices for the fish itself and equally terrible wages. Work in them of course was less independent and pleasant than much of the salt fishery work (even given the salt fishery's tremendous work loads). Some of these issues are delineated in Antler 1977 and Antler and Paris 1979. Although she underplays the physical costs of the light-salted fishery, Antler points out clearly, that even into the 1970s, earnings from making salt fish were still considerably more lucrative than the wages of the fish plant, especially with regards to the wages of women. See Andrews 1969 for an analysis of this factor for fishing families in Port de Grave, Conception Bay.

fishery in the 1950s.

The responsibility for any decline lay minimally on the heads of the fishing people. Fishing enterprises made rational decisions on the micro level and began to make heavier grades of salted fish. Newfoundland political and commercial elites led the Dominion poorly through the unstable markets of the inter-war years. Their bad judgement and failure to plan or develop strategies to counter the declines in the industry reflected narrow, often self-interested visions of the future; these became even more discouraging under Canadian influence.

In this chapter I have attempted to alert readers to the complexity of the Newfoundland salt fisheries, the relationships between them and their products, and the various developments in the inshore light-salted classes and production of the last half century of the salt fishery. In interpreting that complexity I have endeavoured to bring the emic evidence of the micro-economic and production strategies employed by the light-salted inshore fishing operations into the debates surrounding the development of the Newfoundland salt fisheries through to 1950. In doing so I have challenged the assumption that a long term decline in curing skills was a major factor in the decline of those fisheries. At the same time this evidence suggests that a number of factors including the effects of the cod trap and the many production decisions and choices arising from its use very likely broadly affected the overall quality of Newfoundland shore fish. These choices were equally affected by any number of forces at play in the industry, and it would seem in this era that these forces often favoured production that maximised quantity over quality.

These conclusions are based on a small sample of evidence and as such are

clearly preliminary, but I hope that they indicate fruitful possibilities for further research and new means by which such research can be approached. I have tried to demonstrate the usefulness of and potential for employing oral historical evidence in helping to come to terms with these complex issues. At the same time, I have tried to raise a number of new questions concerning these same issues.

In the final chapters of this thesis I explore one particular issue of the many alluded to throughout the preceding chapters -- the issue of how the men and women who participated in the salt fishery were chronically discouraged in various ways from building secure and stable lives and communities within the economic spheres of that industry.

Chapter 6. The Economics of the Salt Fishery:

Fisher Perspectives on Culling and Truck

We never got anything for it. For making salt fish, you know.
(Fisherwoman)

The distrust of the [culling] system of purchase of fish by the merchants has been referred to in previous sections. The distrust applies equally to the price as it does to the culling. The absence of a uniform scale of standards of quality is the cause of this dissatisfaction and misunderstanding, and the fact that the classifications vary in accordance with a good or bad export market tends to confirm in the men's opinion that they are not receiving correct treatment. The culling of fish does not appear to give satisfaction either to the fishermen or to the merchant. The latter appears to find it necessary to supervise the work of the cullers, and the cullers accept the instructions of their employers as to the standard to be used. In any case it would seem to be difficult if not impossible for the culler to follow the same standard for any length of time. Two cullers, working in close proximity, do not appear to be able to follow identical standards.

In view of the large numbers of grades of fish that may be present in any one parcel, and the impracticability of having a full standard of grades always available for comparison, it is unlikely that any person can be absolutely accurate in making a correct cull of such fish. (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 114-15)

When the culling was involved in it ... nothing only gimmicks, all of it.
(Fisherman).

In the preceding three chapters, the day-to-day workings of the salt fishery in inshore communities on the east coast of Newfoundland have been detailed, as well as the intensive physical work, routines, skills and knowledge that fishing families applied to the production of light-salted fish.

Fishing people's perceptions of the economic rewards of salt-fish making from its sale to merchant firms for export will now be explored. The same

fundamental approach of the thesis will be applied in this chapter, and the starting point will be the memories, stories and interpretations of fishing people regarding the workings and effects of the economics of the salt fishery. Their evidence and analyses have received little direct presentation in academic analyses of this complex set of economic relations and addressing the resulting imbalance can shed a great deal of light on the pertinent mercantile (and fisher) practices.

In keeping with the chronological presentation of the steps of salt-fish processing techniques in chapters three and four, this discussion begins with a description of the key initial step of the exchange between fisher people and merchants that predominated in most communities around the island in the era in question. This step was the "culling" or grading of fish. The efforts of individual operators to make the highest quality fish were inspired in large part by the merchants' method of buying fish. For at least two hundred years independent planter or fishing operations brought their "voyages of fish" (the season's production) to merchants to be graded by a culler, a man employed by the merchants, who worked on their premises or aboard their fish-collecting schooners.

This moment of evaluation was crucial in many ways (Small 1979, 48-9). The many weeks and sometimes months of hard diligent labour, the techniques and the knowledge that had been brought to bear in making fish were judged and that judgement determined the standard of living that people would live with for the coming winter. As Larry Small states, "There is little surprise then that conflicts and rows abounded" (49). Culling was viewed as problematic and unfair by the majority of fishing people that I talked with in my interviews. Beginning with the fact that cullers in this era were in the pay of merchants, suspicion and outright

hostility were the normal attitudes that I encountered towards the cull. Suspicion arose for many reasons. For example, fish was handled very roughly after purchase, seeming to belie the need for a perfectly intact product. As well, it was a widespread mercantile practice to re-grade fish before export and this led to fishing people's suspicions that this re-grading favoured the merchant (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 58-9). It is clear from various reports on the salt fishery that these suspicions had some basis in reality (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 104, 118; Newfoundland Commission 1937, 56-7, 114-15 (quoted above).

A number of narratives and commentaries that reflect and express this suspicion and concern will follow. They may not be indicative of the absolute truth of how the culling of fish went. That is something I cannot know. There are other stories and commentaries from fishing people that are less critical of the practice. On the other hand, the following stories were presented as true and I believe the people that told them subscribed to their basic truth. These stories reflect a particular point of view -- that of fishery workers -- and their analyses and meanings must be assessed and understood in those terms.

Fishing men and women have a great deal of evidence to support their various viewpoints and many parts of this evidence corroborate other evidence. Some might disagree and argue that in fact these pieces are actually elements in a corpus of traditional ideas, themes and narratives which are perhaps significant, but not to be accepted naively as literal or absolutely true. While people tell and retell the narratives of their lives and work, they repeat certain key themes and ideas that pertain to the significant things that have happened in those lives. As

such, these repeated tellings are, not surprisingly, prone to formulae, embellishments, exaggerations and borrowings -- often in the service of making particular points (Holtzberg-Call 1992, 19-20; Lovelace 1979; Small 1979, 105-14). This reality is true of all rhetorical or persuasive speech and writing, including academic analyses.

Culling publicly and explicitly evaluated a fishing operation's curing skills. It also determined the standards of living that the members of that operation and their families could expect for the coming winter. There is little wonder that feelings about the cull ran and in some cases continue to run high, and that the stories about it and how they are told reflect these feelings.

On the other hand, despite the potential for the traditionalising effects of narrative on this oral history, the themes, ideas and evidence contained in the materials explored below must be taken seriously as legitimate recountings on various levels -- literal, the figurative and the moral -- especially when striking corroborations exist between the texts of a number of trustworthy witnesses.

Many of the stories presented here are characterised by bitterness, indignation and even anger. The themes and analyses that emerge from this material form one part of a coherent critique of the economic system of the salt fishery. The stories clearly speak on a number of levels to the basic idea that fishing people felt that they were not receiving a fair reward or earnings for the intense and committed labours of catching and making fish. The cull was one of many mercantile strategies used to minimize the earnings of fisher people and

maximize the profits of the merchant firms.¹

Besides culling, fisher people questioned the fairness of a number of other practices attached to the economic workings of the salt fishery, including pricing strategies. Indeed, the entire basis of economic relations known as the credit or truck system was nearly universally perceived as pernicious.² The system was seen as discouraging independence in fishing people as well as the desire to better themselves. As noted above, it certainly did not encourage the participation or independence of women.³ The consideration of the perceptions of fishing people

¹Women seem not to have taken part in the cull to anywhere near the same degree as the men of fishing operations. I asked many of the women I interviewed about the cull and not one recalled having been either an active participant or even a close observer of a cull. A few made comments about second-hand impressions, generally agreeing with the idea that it was unfair, but most had very little to say. Their absence here is indicative of their almost total exclusion from the economic realms of the salt fishery, and more importantly, their almost total lack of control over any of the earnings that accrued from harvesting and processing fish. This thesis and various other sources demonstrate that their direct and indirect contributions to those earnings were clearly very significant and extensive. Women were not justly recognized or equitably rewarded for their work. For example, women generally did not have their own accounts with merchants. Their transactions were usually mediated via the accounts of men -- a situation fraught with the potential for unfair distribution, depending on the men (Neis 1993; NFM-38/39).

²The truck or barter system is explained by Rosemary Ommer as follows:

In essence, it was set so that instead of paying wages the merchant paid "truck" -- that is, he provided the gear for the fishery, along with provisions on credit, against repayment in fish at the end of the season. This meant that the merchant carried the individual fisherman's risk of a season's capital outlay in gear and so on, while the fisherman in return guaranteed his catch -- not his labour, but the results of his labour. (1991, 36-7)

She notes that the terms of this arrangement "heavily" favoured the merchant (36).

³In positive circumstances, women may have perceived themselves as equal participants in individual fishing operations with implicit rights to earnings and so forth. How prevalent such circumstances were in most work contexts is highly debatable. One woman I spoke with mentioned that she felt that her work on the flake (and work in general) was very much a part of supporting her husband's and by extension her and her children's economic well-being. She strove to make quality salt fish to augment "his returns" for their voyage of fish because she and her children depended on the earnings derived.

regarding this system will follow the primary discussion of the cull.⁴

I talked with a number of people who were not as critical of the process of culling and who perceived it as more or less fair.⁵ There was and likely never can be a consensus on any of these topics, but they clearly aroused and continue to arouse intense emotions. I have not tried to disguise or exclude these feelings as they were expressed in the testimonies of various fishing people.⁶ For most, an anger still lingers regarding the real and harshly limiting effects they perceive the entire system had on their lives.

I must clearly state my own position on the issues of fairness and exploitation in the economic system of the salt fisheries. I believe that the claims of unfairness and over-exploitation are justified in the sense that they reflect an unfair system of economic distribution. There is little doubt in my mind that, on

⁴This system in its many combinations and permutations has been outlined in dozens of accounts including the two Newfoundland Commissions cited above (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 79-80; Newfoundland Commission 1937). A good, grounded summation can be found in Small (1979, 9-23). *Ommers From Outpost to Outport* is a thorough analysis of the system as it existed in the 19th century in Gaspé. There were clearly close similarities to Newfoundland.

⁵There is no question that, in principle, the cull was economically (and morally) justifiable: people clearly produced a range of different qualities of product and these fish had to be assessed and rewarded on the basis of their quality. No one I talked with would deny this basic truth and in fact, people were very aware that good and poor fish makers lived and made good and poor fish in their communities. Debate clusters around whether the assessment process as it was structured and applied on a daily basis to people's fish was fair or not.

⁶Their sense of the injustices that affected their lives, while at times uncomfortable, must be acknowledged. By the same token I do not mean to undermine that testimony by presenting some sense of the emotions that the stories and memories aroused. The academic and bureaucratic worlds of writing and presentation are overly constrained by conventions and pretensions of supposed detachment and dispassionate objectivity. Some of this 'distance' comes from being literally removed from the flesh and blood issues and struggles that many of us experience only through documents. It has been argued that this is a strength of academic analysis and discourse. I would argue that it is frequently a great weakness. There are important truths and meanings that documents can and never will convey about has happened and continues happening in our world.

balance, salt-fish mercantile capitalism (one branch of capitalism) rewarded fishery workers very poorly. I am persuaded, for example, that a number of the aspects of culling described below were likely prone to the abuses that fishermen claim. These culling practices were very likely abused by merchants and their cullers on a fairly regular basis as fishing people assert. These abuses may not have been as extreme as they were sometimes described - that is I would not put these abuses in the extreme terms that they were sometimes put to me - but I have a great deal of sympathy for people's feelings of bitterness.⁷ I would also assert that such abuses were not necessarily practised malevolently, maliciously or even at times perhaps consciously. Many aspects of mercantile capitalist strategy were long-standing and legal means by which company profits could be maintained at the expense of fishers. As such, neither merchants nor cullers can be stereotyped as the black villains. Fishermen were not always necessarily lily-white participants in the various economic exchanges that occurred between themselves and the merchant exporters.

Salt-fish merchants operated within a larger economic and ideological system based in part on the premise that the maximizing of profits was right and good. In this sense these merchants were not particularly worse exploiters than any other business person and this thesis does not intend to demonize them or place the entire blame for the economic system upon them. The average returns on investment of the salt-fish industry, relative to other commercial pursuits, seems to have been slightly above average at the end of the last century (Robert Sweeney,

⁷As stated earlier, these extremes often had as much to do with rhetorical and narrative techniques - with expressing a basic truth by exaggerating details *et al.* to make a point.

personal communication, 1995). As such salt-fish merchants operated within the normal limits of profit and its source, the exploitation of labour (I use exploitation in a non-pejorative sense). The ramifications of these economic realities for fishers are discussed below.

Finally the fishing people I talked with were and are highly critical of nearly all mercantile practices that either did or seemed to deprive them of fair earnings and a sustainable standard of living. In this sense they were highly critical of some of the effects of capitalism.⁸

Mercantile firms had a diverse range of direct methods for maximising profits and for quickly passing the burden of any fishery or market downturn onto fishery workers and their families. The shifting of such burdens had been a hallmark of mercantile practice for well over one hundred years.⁹ The discussion

⁸Many of the people I talked with came of age during the Great Depression, therefore their perceptions of the general earnings and rewards possible from the salt fishery were profoundly influenced by those desperate times. Yet it is also clear (partly from the previous chapters) that even in more reasonable times of production, people continually lived very close to the edges of subsistence. As well, the physical, economic, and spiritual costs of such lives, and the long term effects on their development, their communities' and their nation's development (through to its dissolution in the early 1930s), were also too high. Clearly workers in various branches of commerce, industry and trade thought this to be the case in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the workers in the primary industries such as farming and fishing. The proliferation of various co-operatives and unions, including the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland, is a clear indicator of workers' sentiments (Alexander 1977, 19-20; MacDonald 1987).

⁹Handcock describes fairly typical and unflattering tactics (i.e., exploitative) pertaining to the truck system through good times and bad in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (1989, 232-35). He also details some of the fortunes accumulated and the holdings of a number of firms based in the West Country during the same era (217, 225-238). Likewise, other sources from this era outline similarly alarming practices and profiteering. One of the more trustworthy of these, Auspuch, having spent a good many more or less disinterested years in Newfoundland, is particularly illuminating regarding the traditional combination of merchants setting prices (1810, n.p. (but under "Query 28" and also "Query 13"). See also Fay 1956, 151-2, for an even stronger critique in this regard. Chappell, a naval officer stationed here in 1813, spends many pages outlining the chicanery and profiteering of the merchants and large-scale planters (1818: 26-7, 218-22, 225-28, 245-7).

Later the Water Street establishments of St. John's and the larger of the outport operations

of the problematic results of all of these realities for fishing people concludes this chapter and sets the stage for an examination of their long term consequences in relation to the Great Depression that struck Newfoundland particularly severely.¹⁰ I will argue that this system did indeed severely limit the possibilities for improvement on various levels and discourage the achievement of even limited independence or economic control for fisher people. Earnings hovering around subsistence over the long term made fishing people very vulnerable to the worst effects of economic downturns such as the Great Depression. This undermined their productive work and communities (which were already by the 1930s rapidly losing the support of government and capital), and this in turn profoundly disrupted the Dominion itself.

6.1 Culling

From the 1920s to the 1950s, inshore fishing communities on the east coast continued to produce the grade of salt fish that the English shore fishery had made for centuries -- hard-dried light-salted fish. As explained in chapter five, the lightest salted fish of all, pickled or Spanish fish, was produced predominantly in Conception, Trinity and Bonavista Bays. When the weather cooperated and it was made correctly, pickled fish was the thickest best quality fish and produced the

carried on similar traditions, making rather tidy sums themselves into the bargain. Ommer details, for example, some returns and outlines a number of pricing tactics employed by Templeman's of Bonavista that likely contributed strongly to the profits (1989, 175). She notes the remarkable contrasts in wealth between the fisher and merchant classes (176-80). As noted above, she clearly describes the problematic workings of truck and credit in her study of the Gaspé salt fish mercantile system (1981). See for example pages 36-40.

¹⁰Given that a good number of the materials I will quote in this chapter are to differing degrees sensitive, I have kept the identities of the individuals quoted confidential.

greatest return determined by grading and by weight (MacPherson 1935, 8). It required the most labour intensive processing and was the most susceptible to deterioration due to various factors outlined in previous chapters. Despite these risks and problems, fishing operations persisted in its production in locations on the east coast of the island to the very end of the salt fishery in the 1950s. Likewise, elsewhere on the island, light-salting of one form or another also persisted in the inshore salt fishery until its close.

In 1935, for example, light-salted products accounted for 75% of the overall salt fish production (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 112). Newfoundland fish makers were unique by the 1930s in their production of pickled fish, and nearly unique with regard to that of light-salted shore fish as well. Furthermore, the light-salted products were preferred in most markets (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 108-110). There was stiff competition at this time from other salt fish producing nations, but Newfoundland light-salted fish products still had firm footings in most markets (MacPherson 1935, 14-18).

The markets for Newfoundland fish were historically established by this inshore small-boat fish and the demand for this nearly unique and well-made Newfoundland product maintained a sizable market niche for Newfoundland salt fish right to the 1950s. Culling played a significant role in this maintenance. In general, different markets demanded different types and qualities of product. Culling established those types by standardising and dividing the shore fish of small-scale independent fishing operations into marketable categories.

In communities where access to merchants was possible on a more or less daily basis, shore crews would finish drying loads of fish and take them as soon as

possible to the premises of the merchant(s). During this era there were four major salt-fish merchants with either their entire premises or "barter shops" located in Bonavista.¹¹ In communities without ready access to merchants, fish was held until the end of the season and the entire voyage was shipped at once.¹²

Fish culling was the first step of the process by which fish was purchased in this era.¹³ Figure 6.1 is a photograph of men waiting at Swyers's to have loads of fish culled. Cullers examined the loads fish by fish. A culler would quickly measure the length of the fish on a "culling board." He examined its look, colour and thickness, and he often ran his thumb down the backs of fish to feel for the

¹¹A barter shop in Bonavista terminology was a small branch store of a larger firm located elsewhere. In Bonavista proper the Ryans and Templemans had premises by the main harbour. Swyers had theirs in Bayley's Cove (See figure 2.2) and Tilley's was based in nearby Elliston. However, all four (and some other smaller operations) had barter shops located in various fishing areas in and around Bonavista, including the Cape. Templemans had one such shop in Red Cove (figure 2.3), while Swyers and Tilley's had them further down the Cape. In the case of Swyers, these shops were independently operated by managers, akin to dealers, who ran further flung branches of these very large operations.

¹²This latter situation was less desirable as fishing operations were then forced to hold onto and to look after large quantities of fish. Depending on the weather while in storage, fish had to be closely watched for signs of deterioration such as *dun*. Fish might have to be re-spread any number of times, after it was finished being made and before it was finally shipped and culled. As one fisherman put it, such work was being done "for nothing" (there would be no improvement on the quality of this made fish), and it was to be avoided if at all possible. In places where fish was collected at the end of the season, if possible, fishing operations attempted to get a last good day's drying on it before the "Day of Reckoning," to "colour them up," as a fisherman from Change Islands put it (Budgell 1979, 11). Mary Ann Martin remembered the fishing community of Grates Cove working together to air out stored fish in the autumn when word came that the collecting schooners were on their ways (MF-1).

¹³Another form of purchase known as *tal qual* that had been prevalent in the early decades of the century. It was developed ... the late 1800s especially in the heavier salted Labrador fishery, where fish was not graded but bought at an average price per quintal. It became dominant in the shore fishery during World War I due to the remarkable demand in that period for fish. By the late 1920s it had been outlawed (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 104-05) and few if any of the inshore fishers I talked with ever remembered selling light-salted fish by this method.

1.
2.
3.

**Figure 6.1: Fishermen waiting to have fish culled at Swyers's premises
in Bayley's Cove, Bonavista.**



condition known as sunburn.¹⁴ Based on this inspection, fish were placed in piles according to their different grades. These piles were weighed individually, by the quintal or draft, and the earnings calculated and added to the credit side of the fishing operation's accounts.¹⁵ The work of culling was tremendously quick and none too gentle on the fish themselves. By this time the hard-dried product was sturdy and could take a certain amount of such handling.¹⁶

Throughout the process, fishermen from the crew observed and assessed the cull and often kept track of the "tally" of fish of each grade, for comparison with the merchant's tallyman's figures. Fishermen used these tests and other observations of the actions of merchants and their employees to demonstrate the unfairness of the culling. For the majority, culling was a questionable process at best, and to many it was a "rip off" plain and simple. On the other hand, it is no surprise that merchants, many of their employees and some fishermen reject this interpretation of the cull. They contend that it and related practices were fair and necessary. Some even claimed the cull frequently favoured the fisherman (Newfoundland Commission *Transcripts* 1937, 1-10). The truth of the matter very likely lies somewhere in between these opposed extremes of interpretation.

¹⁴A culling board was a long board usually supported on saw horses. On its surface the board had measuring grids for establishing what size-class the fish belonged to: large, medium, small or tom cod.

¹⁵A draft was equal to two quintals or 224 pounds. As a number of individuals usually divided up the earnings of a voyage, the total value of the load of fish was divided amongst their various accounts based on share percentages determined usually at the beginning of the season.

¹⁶I have seen film footage of a St. John's culler at work and was surprised both at the speed and the casualness with which fish was being culled and tossed into their appointed piles. This is not that surprising given the huge amounts of fish they were culled on to grade, usually on a piecework basis, especially in the busy season (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 56). Experienced cullers were reputedly able to gauge deficiencies even at this speed. These features did add however to the overall sense that fishing people had that there was a certain arbitrary quality about the entire process.

One of the main concerns for fishermen was the cullers' lack of independence. One I talked with summed it up this way:

Yes that was their job -- working for the merchant -- got nothing out of it themselves either ... they got lots of shit [from their neighbours] -- excuse the expression ... what could they do? If they didn't do that [cull unfairly] they'd lose their job -- see they'd get someone who would do it.

Feltham notes the low esteem in which cullers were generally held by fishermen (1990, 36). The following excerpts from the Newfoundland Commission of Enquiry Investigating the Seafisheries ... (1937) confirm the basic assertion that cullers worked for the merchants and that this relationship was problematic as far as culling went. They also either confirm (or clearly do not deny) that a strong basis existed for many of the complaints and suspicions that fishermen had regarding various aspects of culling.

It is the practice of many merchants to have fish they purchase, culled by men who have obtained Culler's Certificates under the Culling Act, and are sworn to cull impartially, but there are some who use men for culling who have not complied with the requirements of the Culling Act. Whether the men who do the culling are sworn or not, they are all the employees of the purchasers of the fish....

... but as there are no Government or official standards of definitions of the various classes and grades, the decision in the classing or grading of the fish is left to the judgement of the buyer and/or his culler ... The culler, being a servant of the buyer, is unquestionably influenced in his decisions as to grade, by the wishes of his employer. In consequence, there is much dissatisfaction with the system of culling on the part of both the seller and the buyer.¹⁷ It is claimed by the seller that the standards vary from year to

¹⁷Buyers, i.e. merchants, were dissatisfied with culling due to the fact that they reportedly had to frequently supervise the work of their employees due to errors in and poor standards of grading (1937, 114-115). The commissioners go on to explain why this might be the case given that cullers were often paid on a piecework basis, and speed was therefore often favoured over accuracy (115).

year, being influenced by market conditions and by the wishes of the buyer. When there is an active demand for fish and price is high, the standards of cull are lower, and when there is a small demand and price is low, they are exceedingly high. (1937, 56-7)

Cullers were checking for a number of things in the grading of fish that would lead eventually to the placing of each individual fish into one of a number of grades. With pickled fish there were five grades as noted in chapter four: choice, prime, merchantable, Madeira, and West India, sometimes called cullage. With light-salted bulk fish, there were generally three grades: merchantable, Madeira and West India. The distinctions that separated these grades are found in MacPherson 1935, 12-13. This grading was carried out using a set of criteria including thickness, colour, texture, the cleanliness of the face and back of the fish (free of blood and liver stains and salt), smoothness and perfection of the splitting. As well a number of outright deficiencies -- round-tail, sunburn, dun, broken fish, slimy, too much salt, and insufficient dryness -- automatically placed fish into the lowest class, West India (MacPherson 1935, 11). Regarding these latter deficiencies, there was generally little dispute although some fishermen said that what was thrown out as sunburnt was often times not. A number of men and women pointed out to me how they often would get West India for their broken fish, but later when the fish was being packed for shipment they observed it being regularly broken by the effects of that packing.

People had the most difficulty with the distinguishing of fish into various grades where less obvious distinctions were used to classify them. Many stories played up the seemingly arbitrary nature of the culling of such fish -- arbitrary except for the fact that such fish ended up being downgraded in favour of the

merchant. A large proportion of this downgrading was felt to be based on arbitrary judgements that often could not be duplicated (see example below). Culling at this level was perceived as dubious, as being used to subtly lower the overall price and as certainly failing to reward fish maker's fairly for his or her intense and complex labour.

A fisherman and his wife whom I talked with one day about culling characterized the process as a "rip-off." He told the following story of how, as a young man, he tested the consistency of the culler.

Husband: But I ... we used to take it [fish] up, where we used to sell the fish you know, when I was a boy, at it first, you know [laughing intermittently] [I] wasn't married, you know, was only a young fellow -- fellows would be culling the fish you know, all that fish -- by and by they'd say "I got to go to the toilet now" you know, the culler would say. Well of course, then they'd stop, you know what I mean eh. They'd go on, they used to have an outdoor toilet, out around on the back, somewhere, around the beach eh ...

And uh, when they'd be gone, I used to go to work and take off, take it off of the bar again eh, this number, what they'd call #2 [grade] and perhaps they'd have a bit left on the board eh ... so I'd shuff- take off that eh and put it on -- put it back on the car again ... then I'd take what they had on the bar, what they culled, you know, #2, take up a couple of yaffles¹⁸ of that and put on and my father used to shout "What are you doing there?!! You'll be killed -- don't you do that!" you know, "you young rascal!" or something eh.

... and I said "It ain't that bad now, leave it alone Dad" and sometimes he'd go along, you know, with it. By and by they come back in -- they cull those two yaffles of fish eh. By and by they pick out a few and heave-throw out, you know, #1 and perhaps they'd throw out 5 or 6 out of that same what they put out for #2. I done that lots of times with them ...

¹⁸A "yaffle" is an armful of anything, although usually used for fish.

Wife: They were robbing!

Husband: ... I was trying to prove a point ... that happened a couple times eh -- same what they put out for #2, when I put them back on the board again, a couple yaffles you know, they took #1 out of that eh ... they [cullers] was all there for the merchants eh. Yeah, they was all there for the merchants.

Another fisherman told a story about a particular merchant who was an extremely good culler and "knew his fish," but who one time mistakenly graded an entire load of fish incorrectly. He thought it was choice or pickled fish, whereas it had been dry-salted in bulks. In this case the merchant culled in the fishermen's favour until fate intervened.

MF: And did you get a better grade for that [pickled] fish?

XX: Oh yes. [very certain] I can remember- now I wasn't fishing that year, we had ah- salt bulk, we had a lot of fish, trapped a lot of fish ... And ah my father and -- well they had a carton- and make up some boxes -- and 'cause our store was filled up ... and they put it in boxes and uh they dried it same as you dry pickle, same thing, it was all large....

Anyhow we had this great big fish, all large fish ... Dried it ... great big ... some of them up to 50 lbs I s'pose, you know that's green now, when it was green, you know ... and uh, they were shipping it off up at Zz---s, down there and they had a full car load ... to cull -- it was all culled then, just like I was telling you, Spanish and so and so ... and Father was getting a great cull, you know, really doing good [MF: It was good fish eh?] Real good and this old gentleman, lived over the street from us here, Uncle George we used to call him, Uncle George.... And Old Man Skipper -- that's who was culling, Old Man Zz---'d cull- he'd be out there working like the men see? ... and he was culling the fish now, and he was supposed to know fish, everything eh? And Father never said a word you know. And he was ah -- going- everything going good. And along come- Uncle George came along and he, he said, "Skipper," he said, "what do you think of that for salt-bulk

fish?!¹⁹ [MF laughs]

He stopped [Zz---]. He said, "Jack, is that salt-bulk fish?"

Well he couldn't tell a lie, you see, "Yes," he said, "Skipper."

Just like that, turned it down just like that, la. All graded ... [unclear words here, but indicating that whole load of fish downgraded dramatically] ... 25 or 30 quintals of fish anyway, just like that, gone, although it was going as good you see -- because it was salt bulk. Although it was perfect -- he was culling it! The old skipper himself -- what was buying it!

MF: Zz---?

XX: Yeah, he was buying it himself and uh, that's what Uncle George said, he said, "Skipper, what do you think of that for- for salt-bulk fish?" Just like that! It was turned right down, just like that and put out for #2. [MF: Oh no!] Yeah, yeah.

MF: So even though it looked perfect-

XX: It was perfect to look at, oh yeah, all this great big large fish eh? Washed good, cleaned good, and you know, made good and everything, and dried up beautiful

MF: But it was bulk so-

XX: Yeah, [laughs, MF, unclear words] they turned it down and it went for #2 anyway.

MF: Your father must have been a bit pissed off-

XX: Oh, he said, "I could of bite my tongue," he said. He used to tell me about it lots of times -- "I could of bite my tongue," he said, "I could of hit George right there." [MF laughs]...

¹⁹In Bonavista at the time of this narrative, the term "salt-bulk" implied fish dry-salted in bulks (versus pickled) and then dried on the flakes, that is, what is called shore fish elsewhere. In most other places (and in later years in Bonavista), the term "salt-bulk" was and is usually applied to heavy salted fish that was sold in the green state to firms with artificial dryers.

MF: Did George do it on purpose?

XX: Oh, no, no, no, no, no!

MF: He just said it ... Oh he was saying "this is good fish for salt bulk."

XX: That's right, yeah.

MF: Oh right, he was making a compliment.

XX: Yeah yeah, yeah.... I mean, you know, *Skipper couldn't believe it ... [that] it was salt-bulk fish.*

The story illustrates how the arbitrary nature of culling could sometimes go in favour of the fisherman, although when it happened it was likely, as in this case, accidental and only in situations where the quality of the fish was already excellent. The merchant of this story was depicted by the fisherman as a salt-fish expert -- a good culler who could pick a bad fish out of an entire store of fish by its look and its smell.²⁰ Yet he was fooled by a load of large dry-salted fish that had been made well and seemed by all appearances to be choice pickled fish. Certainly, the judgements of cullers were not infallible. In this case, the quality of the large thick fish, although made by dry-salting methods, was actually indistinguishable to the quality of pickled fish because of the efforts of the women and men who made it. While in principle the premise of the cull was sound -- to standardize and reward accordingly the different classes of fish and the work that went into its production -- the practice was far from perfect.

One other fisherman deftly summed up the whole issue. He had been

²⁰This fisherman told me that the merchant in question could come out from his house and just by smelling the wind, could tell from a great distance that a particular fisherman who made bad fish had brought fish to be culled.

talking about how during the culling of fish it was not that important to keep a close eye on the amount of fish being tallied. One usually knew to the quintal how much fish had been brought to be graded and disagreement did not generally focus on that issue. Then he said,

[But] on the way it was being culled you're talking a different deal altogether.... you'd have to question some things because I mean -- two fish -- caught the same time, salted the same time, made in the same sun, looked the same -- and one'd be Madeira and the other one'd be Prime. You know -- [laughs ruefully] that type of thing."

This man's rueful laugh when he made this simple statement is significant. His family made good pickled fish year in and year out, throughout the salt-fish era. Like so many others, he and his family "slaved" to produce the best product they could. Their back-breaking labours of catching, cleaning, salting, washing and drying are detailed in previous chapters. He would then stand in the presence of a culler who tossed two fish, that he himself could not honestly tell apart, into two separate piles. It is understandable that he and many other people found the culling of fish insulting, indefensible and at times even appalling.²¹ After a culling session, this fisherman described how they would help to load the merchant's truck and often have to ask the culler which pile represented which

²¹Feltham describes a similar scene in his essay "The Dirty Thirties:"

With the price of fish so low, it was extremely difficult for the independent skipper-owner to make ends meet.... To make matters worse, the salted were graded or culled by a culler licensed by the government but paid by the merchant who was buying the fish. It was to the merchant's benefit to have the fish graded in such a manner that required him to pay the least possible amount for it. The fisherman had little choice but to stand by the culling board while the fish that he had worked so hard to catch and cure was sorted into inferior grades, knowing that the culler was reducing his family's food supply for the coming winter. It is easy to understand why fish cullers were heartily despised by the Newfoundland fishermen (1990, 36).

grade, so similar did they look. I asked him also about whether cullers ever changed or could have their minds changed on a culling. He stated the following:

XX: You could at times. Especially if you got very strong about it -- seeing you were ... getting the smelly end of the stick too bad -- you were going to get the smelly end of the stick regardless -- you got that when you started fishing.

But ah, when you could see that- there was times yes, that you could bring something to a halt that was going on too blatant in your fish, you know -- if you want to -- or if you never mentioned nothing, you just took it every which way.

Another fisherman from Bonavista also spoke to this issue. He outlined how a fair culling was unlikely, even when one stepped in and criticized a culler's work or stopped the culling. In fact, the action might actually make things worse.

We could never grumble. Sometimes when you'd be dodging home in the evening, you'd say "Well, that was not a good cull today -- we could've got better than that." You know? And there'd be a scattered fellow, say, people- they wouldn't want to see them cull the fish because ... they thought that they wouldn't get the right cull ... some fellows'd be worse than others in culling fish. But we never had no problems, you know. I don't believe ever my father raised his fist to anyone regarding culling fish. He might have a few times in his life. I think there was a couple times we carried back fish where he thought that he wasn't getting the right kind of cull ... some fellows used to say "He's a laddie he is, he'd rob ya."

Sometimes you'd take it to somebody else, you know, but 9 chances out of 10 you get just as bad a cull there as what you would you know.

This fisherman claimed that the fault for a poor cull lay as often with the fisherman making poor fish and that no amount of culling would therefore improve its chances of being upgraded. At times his father "carried back fish" in order to further dry and improve a load of fish, or at least to match the particular standard

of drying required by the merchant firm at the time.

In the face of a bad cull, fishermen could withhold the fish, wait for another culler or take it to a different merchant. However, many people did not even have these options. The fisherman from Bonavista described this particular circumstance, that many others also mention as occurring on occasion (Bulgin 1978, 100-01; Small 1979, 67):

It used to come to fights sometimes -- 'cause the fisherman -- if he got a bad cull, what he thought was a bad cull -- you know -- he put the blame on the culler, you know. But that's all you could do about that, you know ... if your culler throw out your fish and you disagreed with it -- you know, it was either let it go for what it was -- or take it home. Some people used to carry it back by the handcart loads. Used to carry it back because they wasn't satisfied with the cull you know. Now some fellers I suppose, you know -- if you had anything ... against anybody, you know what I mean, and [he] having to cull your fish, you know, you could throw out good fish -- what was supposed to go for choice, you'd throw it out for #2.

[laughing] And especially if a fellow starts swearing on the culler and everything like that, he's liable, you know, he's liable to go to hell with it, you know ... That happened! Oh definitely that happened boy, yes sir.

This fisherman had a less critical view of culling than most and did not hold that most culling was fixed in the merchant's favour. However, he did state that in certain cases, particular grudges affected the cull of individual fishermen. He asserted that at times there were pressures put on cullers by merchants to cull more strictly and that in these cases a certain amount of downgrading occurred. His estimate was that between fifteen and twenty per cent of culling interactions were affected by such pressures (a much lower estimate in comparison to those asserted by a number of fishermen). Such perceptions and observations led to frequent calls for independent cullers who were free of merchant influence (Coaker

1984, 7-8).

One woman I talked with made the observation that people who generally made high quality fish seemed to be more affected than those that made a more heavily salted product. Her rationale was that in order for merchants to maintain profits when presented with good to excellent fish, it was necessary for them to downgrade the top grades of fish which fetched the highest prices. She believed that the fish of these operations was graded harder than the fish of operations that produced lower quality fish.²² She felt there was a clear disincentive to produce the high quality and more risky labour-intensive kind of fish that operations like her family's did.²³ This also helps explain why a number of people I talked with, and who were members of operations that concentrated on quality production, were equally or more disenchanted with the culling of fish as people who belonged to operations that did not.

Some narratives about such disenchantment take on very extreme qualities. The following story takes the phenomenon of withholding fish from a merchant to such an extreme. The fisherman who told it to me swore that it was true and could be corroborated by the son of the fisherman who did it.

Man lived over across there -- he's dead now of course -- come in here one time -- that was when I was young -- come in here with a trap skiff, half load of haddock -- hove every bit away -- wasn't worth to split a haddock and salt it for West Indie, maybe 50 or 60 or 80 cents a quintal for West

²²This point has significance in relation to the discussions in chapter five regarding the conscious shift away from quality production to quantity production made possible by the cod trap.

²³She made it clear that by this era a number of trap operations in her community had more or less shifted to a fish processing that favoured quantity over quality production. For these reasons they made lower quality fish. The trap operation that she worked in was very careful to take on only the amount of fish that it could make into high quality fish.

Indie -- it wasn't worth it -- he throwed it all overboard. Well everybody want one got one to eat

MF: People ate haddock around here eh?

XX: Sure, they were better than fish! [laughs] In the fall of the year ... he carried his fish up to ---- Harbour in a motorboat, there was no trucks then see, whole load of fish -- motorboat load, trap skiff load. I love up a few armfuls on the wharf, they started culling it, "West Indie, West Indie." The old man looked at it, he said "What are you doing with me fish?"

"Well sir," he says, "that's all you got, West Indie."

"Yes sir" he says, "if that's all I got, West Indie, I'm not getting nothing out of it, is I?"

"Well," he said, "you won't get much."

"All right sir," he said, "heave it down in the boat again, what's there." Hove it down in the boat -- he have a crew of his own see, his own sons. "All right, sir," he said, "now boys," he said, "every bit of it overboard, clean her out." Hove every bit of the fish over the wharf and went on home -- [laughs] he did so -- no joke at all -- one of his sons is living over there yet ...

MF: ... didn't think he was getting a fair price -- it wasn't the right cull?

XX: No, it twasn't the right cull!

MF: Could he go anywhere else?

XX: Where could he go? He had no truck to go in -- you had to steam it then -- motor boat ...

MF: How much thrown over?

XX: Could be 35, 40 quintals -- something like that for sure, for sure it was that much ... lot of work -- and he hove it all overboard -- just as well he did! He wasn't gonna get nothing! So -- why give it to the merchant to make a fortune off? 'Cause he would! It would all be Madeira -- and all

like it is -- we was ripped on the cull ... sell a number one fish to the merchants, if he had his tail broke, he was West Indie. I seen 'em packing it -- if he couldn't get in, take tomahawk, chop the tail off, drive him in --

Me father used to say they went- cullers went to the blacksmith -- had their thumbnails tempered -- to split them open, say they were sunburnt ... there was nothing fair -- nothing -- not one thing fair in them days.²⁴

At the end of this story, the fisherman alluded to another aspect of culling that added insult to injury. The perfect fish could not broken in any way, but when fish was packed in casks for export, many fishermen and women noted the roughness with which fish was put into containers. On many premises, fish were literally forced into casks by a press mechanism called a fish screw. As the pressure was applied, many reported the sounds of multiple cracking fish. This seemed to belie the obsession with the perfect and wholly intact fish during the cull (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 60-1).

The last major area of criticism levelled against the cull was the in-house re-grading of fish for export that occurred later by the merchant and his employees. Re-grading was a standard practice on many premises. It was defended by merchants and their employees as necessary to further subdivide the basic grades for particular markets by size, quality and also in relation to deterioration that might have occurred during storage before shipment (particularly with pickled fish) (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 58-59). However, this second "culling for market" was also unregulated (58-59). This caused suspicion among many fishing

²⁴The days this fisherman was referring to were the worst of this century, the early 1930s, when fish prices went as low as \$2.25 and \$2.50 for a quintal of Madeira fish and 75 cents a quintal for one of West Indie (NFM-18; NFM-34). Greta Hussey reports a similar story from the Labrador fishery of this same era, a year when fish on that coast was \$1.50 a quintal for Labrador soft cure fish (two to three days sun) (1981, 40-41).

people who perceived it as yet another potential opportunity for profiteering on the part of the merchants. A number of fishing people I talked with doubted that this re-grading process was above board. One asserted that while working for a salt-fish merchant, he had observed various dubious adjustments to the grades of fish. He began his story with the observation that it was very difficult for the fisherman to get top grade for his fish (in this case merchantable):

You wanted some fish to be a merchantable [fish] -- for me to get it -- yes sir -- you wanted some fish -- he was a splendid fish all right -- there was no joke about that ... for a fisherman to have a merchantable fish ... [it had to be] white as this piece of paper, and not a speck of anything on it ... not a speck of liver, or blood or anything -- white ... not a sign of a speck of anything ... very rare for fisherman to get merchantable. But he [merchant] got lots of it when he was packing it up in them casks ...

MF: You'd sell it by the grade then would yuh?

XX: Oh yes, yeah Madeira, small Madeira, large Madeira -- merchantable - - there wasn't much of it -- they'd sell a lot of it when he was getting it away, but you wouldn't get too much of it -- [laughs] oh yeah -- yeah!

I worked up for him one winter -- I took notice of that....

Well there was one big pile and it was Madeira -- I suppose it was about the size of this [size of large room] -- the one big bunch.... orders for fish come up -- went up anyway -- started at this big pile of Madeira -- well we got Madeira out of it ... small Madeira -- we got it out of it -- and we got large Madeira out of it, we got small merchantable out of it, we got large merchantable out of it -- all that winter it went down to about 20 quintals and I don't know what happened to that -- what they called that -- we got all kinds of fish out of that bunch ... that's how they made their money -- by God, if he bought that for Madeira, he couldn't sell it for Madeira -- wha? He'd be making nothing that way! ... He bought in a 1000 quintals of Madeira and by God I bet you 600 quintals of that went out merchantable.

Many other fishing people also talked of this phenomenon with similar

suspicion. One fisherman mentioned that there was a constant shifting of grading standards; what qualified as a "#1 fish" varied from year to year. This variance supposedly reflected the requirements of shifting markets. The fisherman believed the shifts allowed merchants and cullers to further downgrade fish for what seemed justifiable reasons. A side effect was an ever-shifting set of standards that fish makers had to meet. As Commissioners of the 1937 Enquiry stated regarding all culling:

The absence of a uniform scale of standards of quality is the cause of this dissatisfaction and misunderstanding, and the fact that the classifications vary in accordance with a good or bad export market tends to confirm in the men's opinion that they are not receiving correct treatment. (Newfoundland Commission 1937, 114-15)

The above litany makes clear that fishing people's perceptions of the cull were for the most part damning. Again, the argument is not that the cull was in principle unfair or that fish were all the same and could not be divided into grades. It is clear from the preceding chapters that such was not the case. There were excellent fish, good fish, bad fish, and terrible fish and people knew the differences between them. They knew in their communities who was renowned for consistently making high quality fish and who was not. Women and men derived status from the productive activity of making fish. Larry Small asserts that in the community where he worked, the cull was on one level for many people a public statement of one's status as a good fish-maker. He also states that, in fact, fish-making was more critical to one's overall status than fish-catching.²⁵

²⁵My findings correspond to his except for the fact that such status was connected to fishing operations where women, as much or more than men, were involved in the making of that good fish and to an extent shared in the status, whether positive or negative.

However, it is equally clear that unfair culling practices regularly prevailed. In a load of high quality fish, a culler could randomly downgrade fish that deserved better grades. The resulting sense of injustice and indignation was only heightened by the fact that incredible toil went into its making and, as Feltham pointed out, each fish sorted into an inferior grade meant less subsistence for the coming winter. For people living so close to subsistence, such methods or the perception of them, could do little else but inspire hostility.

6.2 Truck and Other Strategies

Culling was only one of a number of mercantile practices of exchange. There were also various relatively successful means of enforcing the loyalty of clients,²⁶ and the standard marking up of all prices for all clients (ostensibly to cover general risk and bad debt) and/or the marking up of the prices of those clients currently indebted. Merchants also paid very low wages for their clients' labour and services, and some had accounting methods whereby they adjusted fish and consumer-goods' prices throughout the year. All these methods were not practised by all firms, but a combination of a number of them were employed by many. They were all viewed with suspicion by the majority of fishing people who frequently commented on the resulting indebtedness and enforced obligation that they could never escape from cradle to grave.

Firms enforced loyalty from their clients primarily through the strict refusal

²⁶Accounting records from Bonavista in the late 19th century point to a fair amount of client flexibility in regard to where people held accounts (Sweeny *et al.*, 1992). Much of the oral evidence I collected of the 1920s-1950s era indicates that people, especially those in smaller operations or those who were shipped labourers (working for a fixed wage for merchant or larger-scale planter), felt that they were constrained in various fashions by the main merchant firm where they made their purchases.

to pay cash for any products or labour that they purchased from fishing people. As one trap fisherman put it in relation to selling fish: "but you wouldn't get the money -- you know what I mean. They'd be reluctant to give you the money for to spend somewhere else, you know they wanted you to spend it in their shop." I asked another man who fished through the 1930s if they ever "saw" money. This was the reply:

[snorts] No sir, we seen no money, no, no, no. That wasn't in the question, money, for God's sake. [laughs] I'll tell you, I can remember now -- I'm not telling no lie, I'm not joking -- having ten cents in me pocket till the bugger turned black with dirt, waiting, trying to get a copper to get a pack of Old Bugler [tobacco that cost eleven cents] -- that's the truth! One penny, you couldn't get the damn penny -- you had to pay 'en, but try to get the penny if you could ... I'm telling it like it was, like I had it anyway -- and every person around here had it the same, apart from a couple.

Merchants in different communities also used various systems of accounting -- receipts, I.O.U's and "notes" that could only be used in their own shops -- in order to maintain client loyalty. As the fisherman above indicates, apart from a couple of the better-off fishing families (often from cod-trap crews), most people were held fairly successfully to their merchants.²⁷ This was often by choice. I met a good few who did (and do) feel a real sense of loyalty and obligation to their merchant. On occasion individual firms and merchants did help people through hard times by advancing food, credit and the like. However, there seems to also

²⁷There was some social differentiation in fishing communities amongst fishing people, often based on gear types. Cod trap operations generally produced much larger volumes of fish and therefore did somewhat better on average than hook-and-line fishing operations. The implicit and explicit markers of this social differentiation and class distinction that resulted from this have not been fully explored but interesting discussions can be found in a number of sources (Cadigan 1990; Casey 1971, 54-60, 69-70; Gordon Handcock's contribution to Hiller *et al.* 1987; Neis 1993).

have been many other firms that, when confronted with an economic downturn or a risky client, quickly cut people loose, denying them credit and supplies (for a twentieth century example, see Cadigan 1990).

Another fisherman who worked for a merchant firm one summer had the following story to tell regarding merchant unwillingness to advance cash at any time:

I went up for \$5 for the Garden Party and he wouldn't give it to me -- I wanted to go to the Garden Party. I had around \$100 then up there, maybe more, and I went to him for \$5 for to go to the garden party -- "No, not going for \$5" I looked on a note [he was offered a note] -- I said, "they won't take this up there." He says, "That's the way I pays me men" he says. That's all he said. I said something in me own mind though, all right. I think that was my last year there I think. I worked that summer, after that, that summer, I didn't go then after -- I went fishing after that.

Another key point of contention was the pricing policies of the firms. In most places, it was standard practice to mark-up the prices for all clients and/or the prices for those clients currently in debt (that is, purchasing strictly on a credit basis -- often through the winter) (NFM-44; Ommer 1989, 175). Where this practice only penalized those in debt, it favoured the clients who were better-off fishers or steady employees of merchant firms with good more-or-less assured incomes, those who were infrequently in debt.

One successful trap fishermen described to me how at various times he negotiated deals with different firms on a cash basis. These negotiations he "kept under his hat" and received a lower price as a result.²⁸ Again, this example was clearly an exception and he agreed with my synopsis of his efforts as "trying to

²⁸Bulgin notes the secrecy of merchant-client negotiations in the Twillingate area (1978, 65).

beat the system as best you could." Most others, with less bargaining power and control over their financial situations, were not so fortunate.²⁹ The system clearly tended to minimize the opportunities of those who had less economic capital to work with from the start.

Many men and women sold their labour directly to merchants, to larger scale planters or schooner captains, and to industrial interests such as pulp mills.³⁰ They sold their labour to augment fishing income and/or to work off previous debt. People worked at tasks including making fish for schooners, cutting fire and pulp wood, making barrel hoops and knitting twine. They received the most minimal earnings, generally on a piecework basis, for such work. The following description from an interview with an apologetic Labrador schooner skipper provides a fine example. He details the meagre rates paid to women and men in inshore communities for making Labrador floater (schooner) fish on a piecework basis in the 1940s:

They got 20 cents a quintal for it -- if you washed it aboard the vessel and delivered it to them, you paid them 20 cents a quintal. If they took it salt bulk [green] and they washed it, you paid 25 cents a quintal. *That wasn't very much was it?* Lot of work! And then again it was a big worry on the people that was taking this fish cause they had to run up against the fish being damaged -- you know by foul weather or sun-burned with sun, lots of things like that ...

²⁹See Cadigan 1990 for a detailed interpretation of this social differentiation on the South Coast of Labrador.

³⁰Women were very likely to receive much less for selling their labour (Neis 1993, 193). It is clear that mercantile capitalism was not the only form capable of over-exploiting the labour of others. In many of the reminiscences of work I gathered, industrial capitalism in Newfoundland in the form of pulp and paper interests, received particularly harsh criticism. Prices and working conditions were described as abysmal, especially through the 1930s and into the 1950s. Added to that were the long separations from families and home communities that such work demanded. Feltham corroborates this (1990, 30-32).

they'd do anything then to make a dollar -- that's how it was eh -- do anything then to make a dollar -- *I mean there was no unions.*

People were unlikely to get ahead on such wages, no matter how hard they worked. Further, virtually all exchanges were handled by accounts: purchases were debited against these and fishing people's sales of various "products" such as fish, agricultural produce, wood, barrel hoops and labour were credited towards them. Accounts were usually fully reckoned only once a year in the fall, and this provided many potential opportunities for the manipulation and adjustment of credits and debits in light of economic trends *et al.*, especially in the case of non-literate clients (Bulgin 1978, 62-7; Small 1979, 15). The price of fish could clearly be easily adjusted in any number of ways and, as it was the nominal currency of exchange, fishing people were very vulnerable to resulting "currency fluctuations."

The feelings invoked by such economic relations, conditions and wages (especially through the 1930s when the prices for fish fell to abominable lows) were anger, bitterness and disillusionment. "There was nothing fair -- nothing -- not one thing fair in them days" summed up the attitude of many. The man who made this statement finally gave up fishing after the 1930s. Like many others, he left his young family at home and went to work at various jobs on the mainland, sending money home and returning every few years when he had the chance. In the 1950s, with various upturns in the Newfoundland economy, he came back to the salt fishery. By then the merchant system of truck was fading dramatically, but one day a dealer offered to sell him salt on a credit basis.

they [merchants] had you, see? And after the war was over and everything was over, and I was finished going away ... I went fishing here and a big old truck stopped out there on the road one day ... and then a man come in,

he says "Want some salt?"

I said "Yes I want some salt."

He says "We got a full load there now-"

I said "No sir, I don't want yours."

He says "Why is that?" he says, "my salt's same as the rest."

I says "Yes I know that too," I says "if I takes my salt from you -- the fall you'll come back and demand the fish." "No sir," I said "I'm far enough ahead now -- I'll buy me own salt and I'll sell my fish where I damn well like".... and when the time come to sell me fish -- *I owned it* ... this was in the late '50s.

Attitudes such as this were rooted in the perceptions of suspect economic practices. The lives people led of unremitting labour for so little reward also profoundly informed these attitudes. The end result was the maintenance of comparatively profitable mercantile operations and the minimizing of any potential gains for fishing operations. This conclusion was repeated and illustrated time and again by many fishing people who lived within (or under) the system, year in and year out for much of their lives.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the various perceptions, narratives, and analyses of the micro-economics of the salt fishery from the point of view of fishing people. The materials presented and the life events that prompted them are and were clearly powerful and important to the people that experienced them. I

did not have to dig deeply or prod people for their memories.³¹ The materials constitute an often forceful and eloquent critique of the forces that shaped and sometimes damaged their lives. Given what many people went through in an earlier era, it is not surprising that these stories and ideas have remained so strongly etched in their memories.

The focus has been primarily on the aspect tied most directly to salt-fish production, the critical moment of the cull. This has resulted in the key emic perception that in a number of fashions the cull was organised and carried out to downgrade fish. Fishing people perceived this practice to be a dominant method of lowering costs for merchants and leading of course to the minimizing of any potential gains for fishing operations. The perceptions of the truck system were also viewed in very much the same terms. As stated earlier, it could be argued that these "perceptions" are simply that, perceptions and not facts, and that the stories and memories presented above are very skewed in terms of fishing people's biases and an unfair stereotyping of the mercantile class as a whole. There is some truth in this traditionalising effect and the over-simplified perpetration of a mercantile stereotype (this is not a particularly unusual or unique process (Holtzbeig-Call 1992, 19-20)).³²

³¹This reflects the experiences of other ethnographers of work including Small 1979, 102-04 and Lloyd and Mullen 1990, xi-xii

³²Alexander asserts in *The Decay of Trade*:

It is deep within the folklore of Newfoundlanders to explain their problems by reference to oppressors, and the merchants were the native villains in the pantheon of exploiters. At the same time, merchants as individuals were admired and accorded respect. The villain was not Bowring or Crosbie, but "the merchants." (1977, 135)

There is also truth, however, in fisher people's perceptions and the evidence they provide regarding the exploitative practices and methods of what was fundamentally an unjust system of distribution. People worked extremely hard for very little recompense and knew it. Salt-fish merchants, through luck, hard work and the utilization of various methods outlined above, could do extremely well especially relative to their clients.

Family fishing operations were ostensibly independent salt-fish factories, albeit small ones. It is fair to say that should have been able to achieve greater gains for their primary production. The cull as it was practised, related mercantile strategies and the complex operation of the truck system -- all of these mechanisms sought to and successfully appropriated those gains in many ways. Supposedly independent operators were very nearly dependent much of the time. People did not simply respond to this injustice by demonizing the mercantile class. They also acted. At various times and in various locations, fishers formed cooperative societies and unions such as the Fishermen's Protective Union to protect their interests. The union eventually failed largely due to the opposition of that same mercantile class who were clearly protecting their own commercial interests (Hiller

There is truth to what he says, but I would also assert that he oversimplifies the perceptions of fishing people of and their relations with "the merchants." There is a thin line, for example, between admiration or respect and grudging deference. Further, people were not simply passive in the face of cruel and unusual merchant treatment (and/or the servants of those merchants). John Scott has explored this complicated relationship in more complex fashion in connection to the treatment of sealing crews by the skippers of the sealing vessels of this century, particularly in connection with the *Newfoundland Disaster* (1975). The Fishermen's Protective Union and fishing people responded actively to the blatantly reprehensible and criminal actions of the skipper who was more or less responsible (Coaker 1984, 81, 87, 98, 101).

et al. 1987, n.p.; MacDonald 1987).³³

Various scholars have argued that the mercantile economy and its firms were also vulnerable to the same forces affecting fishing people. The scholars claim that excessive profit-making was not the rule in comparison to other types of businesses. While this is and was true, it begs the question of the effects of such levels of profit and of the operating strategies employed by these businesses to attain them. I have depicted a number of the more significant strategies above. These operated directly on the fishing people who carried out the work that made the entire system possible. Mercantile practices were designed to maintain fisheries workers at a level hovering just over subsistence, thereby maximizing their own profits and maintaining various kinds of control over their labour force.³⁴

In many ways, it does not finally matter whether any particular mercantile practice was patently unfair or not. The net result of these practices was the enforced maintenance of remarkably industrious hard-working fishing families at low

³³Hiller briefly states as much in his contribution (Hiller et al., 1987) to a roundtable discussion of Gerald Sider's *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A Newfoundland Illustration* (1986). In the early decades of this century, fishing people on the east coast of the island made a concerted effort, namely the Fishermen's Protective Union, to organize the salt fish industry along producer-controlled lines. It met with many early successes, but in the long run a concerted mercantile and political opposition effectively resisted its ambitious bid to restructure and rehabilitate the salt fishery. This industry was so crucial to so many (and the very Dominion itself), but by this era it was a faltering, disorganized and neglected sector. Two fine studies of the F.P.U., its successes and ultimate failure, and the era generally, can be found in MacDonald 1987 and Neis 1980. The F.P.U.'s own collected records and reports, published in 1930, provide fascinating reading on the era as well as offering cogent analyses and critiques of many of the issues raised in this chapter (Cooker 1984). There are various other examples of active resistance on the part of fishing people against oppression of various varieties (see Cadigan 1990, Little 1990).

³⁴That is, if fishing people had to labour heavily year round just to stay above subsistence, very little time or accumulation of earnings could be developed in any effort to better themselves and to slowly begin adjusting the terms of the merchant-fisher economic relationship. As well, many were indebted for a good portion of their lives, another factor which bred dependence and a continual sense of "obligation" (Small 1979, 20).

standards of living, and as during the 1930s, sometimes well below subsistence. In the everyday workings of the salt fishery the normal limits of exploitation demanded (and had demanded for generations) tremendous exertions on the part of fishing people. Many of these exertions such as gardening and wood-cutting were domestic supplements to the earnings of the fishery workers and, by default, direct subsidies to middle-men merchants who did not have to supply their workers with the products.

The costs of this system in pursuing the normal returns on investment expected by merchants, were fundamentally too high for fisher people. In other words, the level of exploitation of their labour required to maintain the conventional levels of mercantile profit were too great, that is, over-exploitative. This is my judgement, fundamentally based on the numerous discussions I had with fishing people about their perceptions and conclusions regarding the economics of the salt fisheries and the potential earnings available to them in their own and their ascendants' lifetimes. Finally, feelings of deep and very real inequity and injustice pervade the narratives and perceptions presented here. Forty years after the fact, real resentment and bitterness can still be read in these stories. They unequivocally convey fishing people's perception of this fundamental unfairness.

The harsh limits placed on fishing people by mercantile capitalism profoundly discouraged them. These limits served to destabilise their operations and communities, and finally, in retrospect, the Dominion of Newfoundland.³⁵

³⁵There were other factors, for example, the failure of the Dominion and merchant capital to invest in the fisheries in the first three decades of the century (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 93-94).

When the Great Depression struck, its effects were devastating and neither the salt fishery nor the Dominion ever fully recovered. Within twenty years Newfoundland was subsumed as a province of Canada and the shift to the fresh-frozen fishery began -- another economic engine that certainly did not encourage much independence or feature much opportunity for "getting ahead" for the majority of the population (Antler and Faris 1979, 129-132). These are issues I will consider from the emic perspective in the conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter 7. Conclusion:

The Salt Fishery's Decline -- Reconciling Dystopia and Nostalgia

The work of the salt fishery was central to the majority of Newfoundlanders for most of the last four centuries. It dominated and defined their lives, activities, communities and cultures until fifty years ago. Surprisingly, one critical area of that work, the processing of salted cod -- making fish -- has received very little thorough description or analysis. I have begun to rectify that deficiency in this thesis. Beyond the basic description of the work, I have developed various themes that emerged through the accounts and descriptions that I was given about it. In this conclusion I want to reassess these themes and the issues that they raised in the previous six chapters. In doing so I endeavour to bring together two seemingly contradictory threads -- one a largely positive nostalgia for the world of the salt fishery and the other a dystopian view of same -- that run continually through people's depictions and memories of their lives in the salt fisheries from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Below, I explain in fishing people's terms how and why both threads exist simultaneously in their worldviews. I hope to reconcile the opposing conceptions to some extent through a linking of the analysis and evidence of fishing people with some of the documentary evidence and discussion of this era. That explanation and reconciliation leads me to a brief analysis of the dramatic shift into the modern fresh-frozen fisheries in the 1950s and '60s. That shift brought to a close four centuries of the way of life that this thesis has explored, and I conclude

the chapter by discussing some of the ramifications of that profound displacement.

Making fish in the Newfoundland inshore salt fishery was a very labour-intensive, multi-faceted work that verged on the level of skilled craft. It required a complex set of traditional and traditionally acquired expert techniques and knowledge. In many places this work was carried out to a large extent by expert women, especially in the drying phase. As directors of shore crews, these women were extremely well qualified to produce excellent quality salt fish. Both men and women all over the island took pride in this quality productive work and local status was attached to one's ability to produce good fish.

My basic method throughout this thesis, in keeping with the tenets of contemporary occupational folklife scholarship, has been the micro-analysis of these complex practices, methods, techniques and the traditional knowledge that underpins them all (McCarl 1978). This analysis was carried out in chapters three and four of this thesis and employed primarily the descriptions, memories, and evaluations of the people who lived their lives in that world. I have endeavoured to put emic perspectives on making salt fish first and foremost throughout this work.

It was from fishing people's perspectives -- the memories, explanations and narratives -- that key ideas and themes of this thesis emerged regarding what the work and the world that it supported were like. Four broad areas of material were identified and explored: the complexity of the techniques and knowledge required to make salt fish; the role of women in that complex processing work; the tremendously labour intensive demands of making fish; and the constraints of

mercantile capitalism, its practices and strategies on the earnings possible. Added to these was an examination in chapter five of some key variations in making salt fish. First and most fundamental was the micro-analysis of the work itself. Fishing people reported an exhaustive catalogue of steps, techniques, methods, and bodies of knowledge that I outlined in chapters three and four. People who worked intimately for most of their lives harvesting and processing fish in a very harsh environment had to be tremendously skilled in and knowledgeable about the productive and subsistence activities so necessary to their livelihoods and often to their survival. They took and take deserved pride in the skills and knowledge and in their success in carrying out this arduous and complex work. It is long past time that these achievements should be fully recognised and celebrated. This thesis has begun that process for one of the more neglected realms of Newfoundland folklife -- the processing of salt fish.

In chapters three and four I also explored the multi-faceted dimensions of one of the key findings of my research; that the making of high quality light-salted fish (especially in tricky weather conditions) -- from the cleaning to the final sale to the merchant -- was an extremely involved process requiring complex techniques and skills, expert knowledge, and long experience. The men and women of fishing operations around the island were eminently qualified to conduct such quality work year in and year out, from generation to generation.

As I note in chapter 4 women were largely responsible for the drying of fish, a phase requiring its own set of specific techniques and knowledge. Of the phases, this drying and the salting of fish required the greatest breadths of knowledge and longest experience to execute successfully. In the cleaning phase,

splitting fish demanded the greatest dexterity. Accuracy was needed to ensure the proper look and the least waste; speed to ensure that fish was under salt before it became too soft. At every step, though, experience and skill were necessary to produce fish that approached the ideal types required by merchants for export.

To add to this complexity, variations of technique (and the resulting products) existed at different levels across the range of types and classes of fish. Within a single community numerous variations of technique were possible, but at this level, operations endeavoured to produce a uniform product adhering to a particular set of characteristics which, taken together, comprised the perfect salt fish of a particular class. Likewise, on an inter-community level, variations very probably existed (and an interesting project could be conducted on just this topic), but, again, generally the fishing operations of different communities aimed to produce standard salted fish of various classes.

From chapter five, it is also clear that another level of variation occurred, based mostly on amounts of salting and on curing methods (the basic two being pickling and dry-salting in bulks). A variety of combinations of these variables -- degree and method of salting -- existed for centuries and these produced a range of salt fish products, from the heaviest salted offshore schooner fish to the lightest, inshore small-boat pickled fish. Many of these varieties were produced by dry-salting in bulks, as pickling in watertight containers was less amenable to differing recipes of production. All of these factors contributed to the overall complexity of the salt fisheries and their productions. Many elements could potentially affect the choices made from place to place and bay to bay regarding what sort of fish was to be made and how to make it. Some of these issues were examined in chapter

five via assessments of how styles and levels of salting, how the methods of prosecuting the fishery (inshore versus offshore), and how gear types, particularly the cod trap, all affected salt-fish production.

It is dangerous to make generalisations about making fish for if such generalisations are based only on a single community (or area), or on a single style or class of fish, it will likely be very prone to reductionism and therefore problematic. This thesis has focused on the light-salted classes of fish of the inshore small boat fishery. I established that this fish, traditionally made in the English small-boat shore fishery and dating back to the beginnings of the Newfoundland cod fishery, was the highest in absolute quality due to its light complement of salt. As a result of its light salting it received the most painstaking and labour intensive makings of all classes of fish. In this century, in areas where pickled fish predominated, people continued to use the lightest salting technique of them all to make fish. This fishery generally produced the highest quality Spanish fish (a process to which women's contribution were critical and integral). In other areas, the more predominant methods of dry-salting in bulks, also capable of employing very light salting, seem to have begun shifting their production towards heavier salted fish for a number of reasons. As pointed out in chapter five, this shift was not indicative of innovation, as heavier salting had long existed in other branches of the Newfoundland cod fisheries and were easily adapted to the inshore fishery of the island.

One of the main reasons for this shift was the advent of the cod trap that dramatically increased catches in June and July. These vast catches were very difficult to process by light-salted methods. As well, heavier salting also reduced

the risks involved in making salt fish. The time of drying could be carefully selected for good weather conditions and when the potential for a number of other threats was also significantly reduced. Finally heavy salted fish required less drying time and was therefore a much less labour-intensive product to produce.

All of these factors encouraged people to consciously shift production into this style of fish making. The decision involved trading off quality for quantity. This in turn was tied to the ever shifting prices offered for different types and grades of fish. The net effect of these shifts seems to have been an overall decline in cure quality in light-salted Newfoundland fish.

A number of historians of the salt fisheries have claimed that it was declines in curing skills and the effect that these had on fish quality in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that were significant contributing factors to the overall decline in the Newfoundland salt fisheries (Alexander 1977, 26; MacDonald 1987, 7; Ryan 1980, 50).¹ My research raises questions about these assertions.² In the light-salted sectors, oral evidence from Bonavista and elsewhere indicates that a decline in curing skills was not necessarily apparent from the 1920s on. Further, two reports which assert that the recruiting of women and children into shore crews hastened the decline of fish curing skills (and therefore fish quality) seem questionable (MacDonald 1987, 7; Ryan 1980, 44). First, each claims that this problem occurred at a seemingly distinct (but different) time period (1830s forward and 1870s forward respectively). Secondly, other documentary evidence suggests

¹Although many of them clarify these statements by placing as much of the fairly blame for these declines on the disorganized and cut-throat mercantile strategies of purchasing and exporting during different periods and in different branches of the fishery.

²MacPherson also challenges the contention as well (1935, 14-18)

that women were active in fish making as early as the late 18th century (Anspach 1810), and many other later sources indicate that this participation continued (see chapter four, section one).

This is not to dismiss the claims that absolute declines in quality did occur. In chapter five, I argued that conscious choices were made to move away from the very light-salted production. These were made in relation to, for example, developments such as the spread of the cod trap. That gear type seems to have been a key factor leading to heavier salting in many places. This led to a resulting decline in quality in those places. The trap with its run of smaller, caplin-glutted, frequently softer fish (also due to it being caught in shallow and warmer water) affected salt-fish quality and style in a number of ways. But other factors also contributed to operations making this conscious shift to production favouring quantity over quality. These included the erratic nature of marketing and resulting price differentials in the different grades of fish (Ryan 1980, 51). Even in the pickled fishery some operations opted to maximise quantity at the expense of quality. As discussed in chapter six, preliminary evidence suggests that such choices may have been tied to mercantile culling standards and strategies which according to some witnesses seemed to have graded premium fish more harshly (Laura Whiffen, personal communication, 1995). This provided further incentive for fishing operations to shift their curing practices accordingly.

One of the main points I make in chapter five is that there is little reason to suspect that curing *skills* declined or devolved in the period 1880 to 1940. It has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis that these skills were very long-standing practices -- techniques and knowledge passed on from generation to

generation of fish makers of the light-salted inshore fish for over two hundred years in both the pickling and the dry-salting regions of fish making.

Still all of these arguments raise a number of questions about the causes of the decline of the salt fishery and the relative significance of each cause in that decline. Did cod trap technology lead to heavier salting in dry-salting regions due to the fact that as a method dry salting was more adaptable to heavy salting where pickled fish was not? Further, when did the overr 'l shift to heavier salting take hold of the inshore dry-salt fisheries and why? Clearly heavy salting was less labour intensive, but when and why did it become more attractive to fish makers -- was it in relation to shrinking differentials in prices between the light and heavy-salted classes of fish? Or was it mainly because of the cod trap? Or was the disarray and disorder of mercantile *laissez-faire* purchasing, marketing, and exporting through the early decades of the century the major culprit (disarray relative to other North Atlantic competitors who standardized and subsidized their fisheries through this same era)? The scope of this work does not by any means permit the possibility of coming fully to grips with such issues, but I hope that it has shed light on some of the directions that could be taken in sorting them out, as well as raising new questions and issues for consideration, and providing potential avenues of investigation.

Finally, while somewhat esoteric, the answers to these questions are important to the consideration of why the Newfoundland salt fish industry as a whole came to a more or less jarring halt in the 1950s. That brought to a close a tremendously long and strong set of traditions and ways of life -- dramatically disrupting and displacing the many communities that relied on that industry, and in

so doing disrupted the entire society and culture(s) of Newfoundland. It is to the discussion of that dramatic transformation (or disjunction) that I now turn.

A significant theme runs throughout almost every section of this thesis: people's repeated assertions about and depictions of the profound levels of manual labour demanded by the making of pickled and light-salted fish. At the height of the fishing season the demands were frequently brutal in terms of hours worked and the physical toll exacted. But, as in many primary productive contexts, whether marine or agrarian, the fishing women, men, and children were raised on such hard work, and were capable of meeting its requirements. This is not to downplay that labour and its various costs -- to blithely romanticize it in the tradition of the pastoral. At the same time I would assert that too much emphasis can and has been put on the opposite, anti-romantic dismissal of that world and its work (O'Flaherty 1975).³

It is clear from another vantage that people also perceived that their lives in the salt fishery held many positive benefits -- even the work of making salt fish itself, despite its back-breaking quality, provided many women and men with a

³Interestingly, in a recent column in the *Evening Telegram*, O'Flaherty swings back towards a more balanced vision of the salt fishery in writing of a vanished salt fishing community in Conception Bay (1995). He typifies it and the fishery of the 1940s and '50s (though in decline) in terms including "vigorous" and as having "an economy that sustained life." The arch-modernist and anti-romantic tenor of his analysis from twenty years ago has clearly mellowed, become less stridently anti-nostalgic. Would that it were so of a number of others who persist in depicting the entire history of the salt fishery and its communities in terms of the dark years of the Great Depression. They typify these communities as impoverished, backwards, and even primitive places. This dismissive rhetoric has often been deployed to rationalize calls for downsizing rural Newfoundland and it is demeaning and often infuriating -- reprehensible as well as ignorant and offensive (Porter notes the "downsizing agendas" prevalent since the cod moratorium of 1992 (1993, 56); Ommer cautiously alludes to the rhetoric in her "One Hundred Years of Fishery Crises" in relation to the comments of an unnamed senior official of a multinational fishing firm (1994, 7). For an earlier, wry commentary on various imperial governments and Newfoundland's own obsession with downsizing its population, see Alexander 1988, 11-12.

sense of esteem and control or independence. They took well-earned pride in the tremendous degree of diligence, the amounts of knowledge and in the various skills that they possessed and applied to the primary productive work of their lives and communities. That work also created a significant physical and social spaces (that is, in the stages and stores and on the flakes) where important community and communal interaction could and did take place -- particularly for women and their flake-work.⁴ Many of oral and documentary sources comment on this particular effect of salt fishery work. The opportunities for such interactions have been sadly diminished by the disappearance of the spaces and the work. In many ways I believe that when older men and women spoke to me of their sense of modern isolation or lack of connection in their communities, and even alienation from their neighbours (and how it was different in the old days) -- it is not simply nostalgia. They were partially alluding to this significant change.

Salt fishery work has been too often simplistically dismissed and even denigrated as slavish and menial drudgery, not worthy of even recording, never mind honouring or celebrating (Wells 1993, 209).⁵ I hope I have demonstrated

⁴A space clearly very different from that of the fish plant that to some extent replaced it. For example, the inter-generational contact and connections (that I was frequently told a great deal about) were created or engendered for both men and women by the occupational spaces of the salt fishery -- in stages and fish stores, and on flakes -- out of doors. Older women and older men spent a great deal of time working and talking with the younger generations in these contexts. That significant occupational space for interaction was greatly curtailed by the centralising of the fresh fishery, again, particularly for women (who had little to no part in harvesting activities or boat work generally).

⁵Alexander examines such attitudes at various points in *The Decay of Trade* (for example, 1977, 130, 143-44). Janet Gilmore has written a thoughtful analysis of the various negative and positive stereotypes applied to fishing peoples in many different locations around the world (1990). Some of her findings regarding depictions of the fisheries and fisheries work as low-status occupations would seem to apply to Newfoundland. I noted the correlations with agrarian work in 19th century England in the introduction to this thesis (Burnett 1984). Paula Johnson makes some brief comments on similar issues with regard to oyster shuckers and the status of their work in Maryland (1988, 38-41).

that these assumptions are largely wrong as well as distasteful. Below I will argue they are also mildly politically suspect. Finally, making fish and all that it entailed was based in centuries of complex and enormously *effective and productive* traditional ways of life that were tied very much to the natural rhythms of nature, the seasons, and human lives. The work, skills, and knowledge of the women and men that I worked with deserve much better treatment than they have received to date and I hope this thesis has gone some distance in redressing that long-standing neglect. Likewise their communities were generally vital, stable, sustainable and frequently pleasurable places to live and to work, despite the difficulties of that work and despite the dreadful neglect with which their inhabitants were treated, especially in this century.

A question remains: how finally can we reconcile these seemingly disparate visions, the seeming paradox of utopian and dystopian views of the world of the salt fishery? From talking with fishing people, it is clear that both men and women were capable of holding both views simultaneously, maintained elements of both in their worldviews and were not hesitant to express them. As much as anything they needed to make clear to me, a young and uninitiated mainlander, that the world of the salt fishery was indeed a universe unto itself. Their lives have no modern Newfoundland equivalent.

I believe that one way to begin to make sense of this contradiction is by coming to an appreciation of the level of earnings and income that were derived from the work. A recurring thrust of so many stories was that people worked literally like slaves for very little, in fact often for the barest minimum for years of their lives. That subsistence was their (and their foremothers and fathers) only

reward for producing light-salted fish -- an intensive, complex undertaking.⁶ Light-salted fish was the most valued, the preferred product of the European markets, the product that had maintained the main and steady Newfoundland market niche for over a century and a half. Yet the year-round toil required to produce it provided very little in the way of short or long term improvements in living standards for the majority of fishing people.

Many of the men and women I talked with spoke of the basic feeling that lives so full of continual toil had finally been too narrow and constrained by those demands. In this century, for example, the opportunity for formal education and the possibilities that it might have provided for improving people's lives and communities was frequently curtailed by the demands of low earnings and year round subsistence activities.

Years of struggle and striving to try to get ahead materially or to get out from under continual debt led finally to a deep sense of regret and in some cases bitterness, especially given the diligence and hard work that was put forth.⁷ The reality of these feelings cannot be ignored, dismissed, or forgotten.⁸

⁶And it was through the diverse productive activities (cutting wood, gardening, building homes, keeping animals and so forth) of the seasonal round that subsistence was maintained by fishing people, thereby significantly subsidising merchants and governments.

⁷One man told me that as a young man, in his eagerness to make his way in the world, he walked (due to a rail strike) from Bonavista to Clarenville with very little sustenance in order to ensure that he got to the pulp woods a few days sooner than he would have if he had waited for the strike to be settled (to cut pulpwood by hand for a horrendously small piecework wage). He ruefully told me that looking back on his life, now knowing the odds against the possibility of his truly ever getting ahead -- even modestly -- that he would not have put himself or his loved ones out to the extent that he had. Many others spoke of equally extreme exertions, finally to little avail.

⁸Some may contend that the prevalence of such feelings are largely the result of my sample being composed mainly of men and women who came of age during the Great Depression. I would agree, but only to a point. It is clear to me that the quality of life in the salt fishery before (and even after)

In chapter six I explored the fishing people's ideas about how the economic system -- mercantile capitalism -- and its practices (such as culling) and mechanisms (such as truck) -- were in many cases directly tied to the limiting of their livelihoods, their lives, and their communities. I believe that many of their perceptions and critiques have validity. In reasonably prosperous times, the majority of people, utilizing their skills, capacity for committed hard work and year-round occupationally pluralistic activities, could keep themselves and their families more or less independent, healthy, and contented (NFM-34; NFM-35/36/37). But except for a minority of fishing people, Newfoundlanders working in the fishery had very little hope of achieving even limited financial security and independence -- security and independence needed to deal with personal setbacks and economic downturns.⁹ With the severe illness or death of a spouse, life could become extremely difficult for families, particularly with the death of a husband, as widows had fewer opportunities to earn a reasonable living than widowers. I was told many painful stories of widows and their families left destitute, of women struggling to keep their families together and healthy, relying on badly paid work, extremely limited state welfare and the charity of neighbours (many of whom also lived perilously close to subsistence) to do so.

One winter's day I was talking casually by a roadside about the old days

that horrendous era was determined by many of the same very limiting factors. This is discussed below.

⁹Handcock briefly discusses this minority of fishing people and the reasons that they could and did thrive to varying degrees in pre-Confederation Newfoundland in his response to Gerald Sider's arguments put forward in *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A Newfoundland Example* (1986). George Casey also delineates similar social differentiation and the reasons for it in his study of Conche, "Traditions and Neighbourhoods: The Folklife of a Newfoundland Fishing Outport" (1971, 54-6; 69-70).

with two older men from the Bonavista area; they had been talking of how those times had been characterised by hard work -- "slavery" as one of them typically described it -- but yet (again typically) how at the same time everyone was happy, worked together in various ways, and shared things -- not like the present day.¹⁰ Then he said: "The old people used to say: 'You were all right until there was sickness. Once sickness came, you were done.'"¹¹ The other man, a trap fisherman agreed. In other discussions with me this second fisherman had often played up the salt fish era as largely positive era, even wonderful -- 'a good and healthy living if one were willing to work' -- but he knew what his friend was getting at right away and agreed.

Later that day I thought back to another discussion that I had with this trap man, how he had explained to me that in order for a fishing operation to succeed, every key actor in it had to be fit and able to do his or her part. He talked of his grandmother, widowed early with young children, barely scraping by, having basically to beg, that is to rely on the handouts of neighbours and on any bit of work to keep the family going until her sons grew old enough to go fishing for themselves.¹²

Then, a few months later, I discovered that four days before our discussion

¹⁰This variation on the formulaic statements "things were terrible in the past, but we worked together, shared and were happy -- happier than we are now" came up regularly in my conversations with people and they cannot be dismissed out of hand as simple misguided nostalgia. They speak to a number of issues including the need for communal work to achieve certain goals and the communal nature of salt-fish work spaces described above.

¹¹These are not direct quotes, but paraphrased as best I can remember.

¹²He also characterised her by the way as an excellent fish maker who kept a neat and orderly flake and consistently produced top quality salt fish -- a skill for which she was well known in the community.

on the road, I had jotted in my field notes (after having heard a number of similar stories from other people, many that concerned widows): "the Darwinian hardness of this place -- no weakness goes untried, no weakness forgiven or tolerated -- if fate kicks a blow. If you are sick ... or crippled, the place will not or cannot lend a major hand -- very reminiscent of subsistence -- sink or swim."

The world of the salt fishery was by no means an easy or forgiving place. John Burnett commented on similar factors that faced agricultural workers in Britain in the 19th century, alluding to two opposing forces, one that maintained communities and the other destructive of them:

but even the regular farming operations like ploughing, sowing, reaping and mowing could bring satisfaction if men were not overburdened with poverty or fatigue. Like domestic service, farm labouring gradually sank during the course of the century into a low-status occupation, and the more ambitious men, who may have liked their work well enough, felt almost obliged to get away to the town, the army or the colonies in case they were thought to be shiftless yokels. (1984, 31)

The assertion here is that despite meagre wages (especially by comparison to today's standards) and back-breaking labour, there was still the possibility of satisfaction and dignity derived from skilled work and the small "measure of independence" afforded by the organization of the fishery along the lines of small-scale independent operations (to draw a parallel here with English agricultural work -- Burnett 1984, 30). It was also derived from the stable supportive structures of small communities in Newfoundland -- "the place to belong." These places' social structures were based "on kinship ties, with little social differentiation and specialization, and a high degree of social equality" (Pocius 1991, 15). These very values were noted appreciatively by many of the men and women with whom

I talked. Nostalgia for the positive and beneficial aspects of that life and those communities did, and does, exist alongside the clear recognition of how difficult life in them often was (Holtzberg-Call 1992, 201-03).

It was only when wages or earnings fell too far below what it was possible to live and raise children on, that the system which demanded such hard work and patterns of life became indefensible and intolerable. People knew that the world they lived in at times tended towards the intolerable, that in many ways, living so close to subsistence, or as many have put it, "never being able to get ahead," was hard on their lives and communities in many complex ways.

When the entire social and economic system itself became 'severely ill' in Newfoundland through the 1920s and into the Great Depression of the 1930s, the results were catastrophic. With the post-World War I collapse of fish prices and the ongoing national failure to support the salt fisheries via economic investment, the Dominion's economy was profoundly weakened (and further hit by almost total harvesting failures in the early 1930s on the east coast). This dreadful set of circumstances was brought on as well by flawed national investments in projects outside of the fishery, and by the carrying of a huge war debt (Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933, 91, 93-4).¹³ When this was followed by worldwide

¹³Much of this information is outlined in the infamous Amulree Report (as the 1933 Newfoundland Royal Commission report is known), but pieces of it can also be found elsewhere, for example Newfoundland Commission 1937; Alexander 1977, 1, 15; MacDonald 1987, 7-14, 86-7, 131-2. As this century progressed, merchants along with a series of Dominion governments gradually withdrew investments and support from the salt fisheries. That, in conjunction with the badly disorganized and highly competitive purchasing and marketing methods of salt-fishing merchant firms were the principle causes that led to a slow decline of the industry (Alexander 1977, 134; 160). The fishery, undercapitalized and neglected for many years by successive national governments more interested in pursuing a diversified economy, was in a sorry state. This neglect had been pointed out for many years by the Fisheries Protective Union and its leader, William Coaker, but a fractious political climate and various political interests (including the mercantile elite) did not allow for any positive coherent

depression in the 1930s, fish prices and earnings hit a remarkable low. The population dependent upon an already beleaguered industry was driven into dire poverty. Hunger, destitution, and disease were rampant. Fishing people continued to try to earn a living at fishing, but the returns for the hard, demanding labour and its output were pitifully small. Many of the men and women I worked with were young adults in the prime of their lives at this point in Newfoundland history. Their memories of this tragic era are tinged by turn with anxiety, sadness, bitterness, and even to this day, anger and resentment at the way they were treated at a dole rate of six cents a day per adult -- money for which they were often expected to work for long hours at heavy labour.

In many ways and for complex reasons, the fisheries, the communities and people who worked in them had been more or less abandoned by the policies of national political and mercantile élites, and it could be argued that the salt fishery never recovered from these terrible decades (MacDonald 1987).¹⁴ In many respects

steps to improve that state (Hiller 1993, 366-8; Coaker 1984).

¹⁴This abandonment occurred over the long term via over-exploitation and underdevelopment, but by the twentieth century with living and education standards improving dramatically elsewhere, it became particularly indefensible and destructive. Fishing people maintained their operations and continued curing fish as best they could -- relying on generations of traditional knowledge, skills, and resourceful flexibility to cope with this neglect -- struggling to hold up their side of the centuries-old lop-sided bargain. A troubling and pervasive view of many analysts and bureaucrats, expressed in many ways and encouraged by much scholarly work, is that the fishery and Newfoundland have not for over a century been able to support their population -- and various attempts to downsize have occurred (often in aid of other economic and social agendas), including the latest, engendered by the cod moratorium of 1992 (Porter 1993, 56).

As early as the 1940s, commissions of government, then the National Convention, and then post-Confederation, federal and provincial governments, all actively encouraged more centralised (and capital intensive) fisheries processing -- heavy salted processing operations, the labour requirements of which were not so extensive as light-salted fish, and then, by the 1940s, via the fresh-frozen fishery. Both routes, but especially the fresh-frozen model, would have led (and did) to the massive dislocation of the light-salted fishery and its communities (Alexander 1977, 10-12, 130). As early as 1935, MacIpherson, a scientist at the Division of Fishery Research at the Newfoundland Department of

the communities of the salt fishery, the rural backbone of the Dominion, never recovered. Many of the men I talked with left the fishery in droves, and many of these left the island at the end of this period, driven by the necessity of having to feed their families and disgusted with the hopeless returns that the fishery had generated for years.

Given this terrible era of the Great Depression and the arrival of over 100,000 American and Canadian soldiers with all their wealth and modern ways through the next two decades it is not that surprising that a dystopian or anti-nostalgic vision of the salt fishery flourished in the 1940s and 1950s which has been passed down to this very day, both in fishing communities and amongst the élites (where it was already well established) -- élites that led Newfoundland into the so-called modern era.¹⁵ The attitudes that emerged, based as they were in such harsh experiences, helped a great deal to stereotype (especially from outside of the fishing communities themselves) the salt fishery, particularly the inshore small boat fishery, as a "low-status" and impoverished industry of last resort, paving the way for various new and modern approaches that were embraced by many as a panacea.¹⁶

Natural Resources argued that heavy salted fish and artificial dryers might have been the more economically viable route (1935, 40).

¹⁵Casey describes this attitude amongst Conche residents of the late 1960s as follows: "Many still associate the poverty and hardship of the Depression with the fishery" (1971, 59). He goes on to describe how even by that period parents were still encouraging their sons to seek work outside the fishery and Newfoundland. I have come across the attitude myself on a number of occasions in the last four years. The parallels to the negative and destructive stereotyping of farm work in 19th century England (described above by Burnett) are striking.

¹⁶I refuse to subscribe to this depiction of the salt fishing industry and the communities as horrendously backward and impoverished anachronistic places -- or to similar depictions of the people who lived and worked in them. The Depression was devastating but should not be employed as

By the 1950s, Confederation and the fresh-frozen fisheries seemed to offer solutions to the terrible problems that had beset Newfoundland in its recent past. Resettlement followed. This was the end of the salt fishery, a fishery of which there remains today barely a trace after four hundred years of its being absolutely central to the livelihoods of all those who worked in Newfoundland.

Finally many have asserted that the ending of the salt fishery was inevitable, that the work involved in light-salting fish was far too labour intensive and exploitative given the earnings possible even in the best of times. They claim that the industry was based in and on archaic technologies and methods, and dominated by similarly archaic and exploitative mercantile practices and mechanisms. This supposedly anachronistic industry was slated for dismantling and it was only Newfoundland's isolation that had maintained it for so long (Alexander 1977).¹⁷

It is important to point out here that it was and has been in the interests of various interest groups -- political and corporate -- to establish a discourse that portrays a dystopian stereotype of the salt fisheries based on many of the ideas

representative of what life in outport communities had been and could offer. Inshore salt-fishing communities were viable places and their people were efficient producers of high quality products for generations and continued to be so right to the close of the industry and on into the so-called modern era. In this regard I find myself in accordance with the work of Pociesz (1991) and Sweeney (1995) that challenges conceptions of these places as isolated, backwards, and anachronistic.

¹⁷At various points in *The Decay of Trade* Alexander examines these views as they surfaced in various sources. To his credit he questions the logic and fairness of a good many of them, arguing that the salt fisheries were too easily abandoned (largely by the Canadian government) in the 1950s. See 143-44 for a fairly good summary of many of the arguments (1977). Interestingly, his assessment of a decline in cure quality of light-salted fish on 144-45 agrees with my own. He implies there that lower quality production truly began in the light-salted sector in the last decade of that branch of the fishery, that is, in the 1950s -- very much what my oral evidence indicates.

above.¹⁸ This one-sided depiction attempts to establish certain 'motifs' (to employ folklore terminology) of the salt fisheries at their worst -- that is, as they were through the 1930s -- as the norm. So utter poverty, hunger, disease, backwardness, brutal labour, and dirt become the only ideas associated with the industry. On one level this was and is carried out in order to define and control the debates surrounding modern fisheries policy and directions. While many of the men and women I talked with over the last three years remember with bitterness and anxiety the terrible 1930s, that period does not solely define their understandings of their lives in the salt fisheries.

They recall that even though the work was tremendously hard, their independent, skilled, and committed labours produced high quality fish. It was work and effort in which they can and should still take a great deal of pride -- expertise and skills that can still provide a sense of identity and self worth. It was also work that was carried out in the context of stable and supportive close-knit communities. They are also acutely aware, though, that in those times, the forces of mercantile capitalism regularly limited their quality of life, maintaining them at about subsistence -- where with one failure or economic slump, that world could and did become the dystopia described above.

This thesis has challenged a number of the more narrow dystopian motifs placed onto the salt-fish industry, its communities and people. Such depictions have been employed for decades to defend and espouse the supposed panacea of

¹⁸Fresh-frozen large scale fishing corporations are a prime example (Wells 1993). They had and have a vested interest in getting and maintaining control and access to fish resources, often in direct competition with smaller scale interests -- not to mention their need of a labour pool to run their trawlers and fish plants (Antler and Paris 1979).

the fresh-frozen fisheries. Again, this is not to argue that the demands of the light-salted inshore fisheries were not incredibly labour intensive and often harsh -- especially given the mercantile system that largely determined people's living standards within the industry. However, Alexander asserts throughout *The Decay of Trade*, that with capital investment, support, and organization of various kinds the salt fisheries could have been brought through the crises that beset them and Newfoundland from the 1930s to the late 1950s, after which international prices for the products began to rebound strongly (the demand for light-salted fish never shrunk dramatically through that period -- evidence that its quality had not significantly declined).

Alexander's (comparatively) radical take was that with such an approach the dramatic negative effects of the shift to the fresh-frozen fishery could have been largely mitigated. I would go further. With long-term investment in the industry, national support, subsidies and organization (along the lines of that proposed by the Fishermen's Protective Union in the early decades of the century) the industry might have weathered the era stretching from 1920-40 much more successfully. Had large scale investment in artificial drying equipment and the like been followed up, and coherent marketing and trade strategies been pursued, then with the coming of the 'modern era,' salt fishing operations might have been able to avail themselves of mechanized solutions to a number of the more labour intensive and risky processing problems posed by the making of light-salted fish. The industry, in some form, might still be with us today and providing a more diversified set of products and markets than existed with fresh-frozen cod.

Certainly markets for salt fish have never completely disappeared.¹⁹

In its place a decidedly myopic, Canadian-backed headlong and ill-planned rush into the fresh-frozen fishery began in earnest in the 1950s. It was a very vulnerable single-commodity and single-market production plagued by over-capacity. Neither did the panacea of the modern fishery particularly improve the living conditions for most fishing people (other factors were responsible for that -- Canadian social security *et al.*). Prices for fish were exceedingly low for many decades. A marked labour-saving was gained for fishermen, whether for selling fresh fish or for heavy salting fish and selling it green.²⁰ Many women traded the work of the flake for the fish plant. While this arguably lessened the quantity and quality of their labours (and the economic risks inherent in salt-fish production), the terms and quality of their new work as wage labourers and the industrial environment were far from perfect and wages here were also pitifully low for years and years -- particularly for women. Added to this, the loss of independence and control of their own labour were equally significant costs. As noted, a number of women I talked with even preferred the flake work to the plant, and if they had a more dependable and better income from making salt fish would happily have gone on with that work. I have noted above the possible social and community costs of this shift from the flakes into the plants.

¹⁹The Canadian Saltfish Corporation finally closed its doors in the early 1990s -- and that was not for the lack of markets, but for the lack of fish resulting from the collapse of Newfoundland and Labrador cod stocks.

²⁰This led to considerable labour-savings for fishermen but not a vast improvement in earnings. The majority of the men I talked with who went fishing on longliners in the 1950s and '60s never made money at it. The price of fresh fish was astoundingly depressed for many of the same reasons that the price of salt fish had been.

Antler has shown that through to the 1970s fishing earnings derived from the making of salt fish could have been significantly higher than those made in most fish plants (1977). She and Faris argue convincingly that the shift from the salt fishery and its communities to the resettled communities and factories of the fresh-frozen fishery was not by any means simply just for the sake of modernization and the assumed improvements that such implied. It was in reality a more or less calculated effort to shift ownership and control of the fishery (and its production) from the small-scale traditional inshore fishing operations to the interests that own and control the large-scale operations of the fresh-fish industry (1979). The profits accruing from the production of the fishery continued to be shunted away from the primary producers of the industry -- independent fishers and wage-labour plant workers -- until the recent collapse of the fish stocks (Antler and Faris 1979).

It is not that great a leap to assert that this development has led Newfoundland, limping nearly all the way, into its most profound crisis yet -- the collapse of the cod-stocks in the late 1980s and early '90s. Industrial, heavily capitalized and large-scale solutions to harvesting and processing fish have produced either indifferent or disastrous results at nearly every turn -- the latest downturn being the most catastrophic. It is a global problem that applies to many other industries besides the fishery.

We can only hope that it is not too late to salvage a sustainable, technologically and economically appropriate fishery for Newfoundland, that it is not too late to learn from the errors of the recent past that led us here. There are a lot worse models than the salt fishery from which we could learn a number of

important lessons, and discover any number of examples both to emulate and to avoid in any future development (if there is to be any). In the meantime, if we are ever fully to understand what that fishery, its culture, communities and societies have to tell us from the level and point of view of those who participated in it, we had better get seriously working. Within a few short years even the memories of that world will be gone.

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Appendix 1. Interviews Conducted

This is a listing of all the taped interviews made during the course of the research for this thesis. There are two groups of interviews -- the first comprises those carried out solely for my own thesis research. Second were those conducted as part of my research for the Newfoundland Museum. The former are identified in the body of the thesis by the prefix "MF" and the latter by the prefix "NFM." All of these are available in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore Archive (MUNFLA). My own collection of tapes (MF) are included in the collection identified by the accession number 95-625. The museum tapes (NFM) are part of the collection with accession number 95-626.

The interviews and their tape #s are listed by the main participants, dates (in chronological order) and by the community where the interview took place.

Ferguson Research Tape Collection (MF). (MUNFLA Accession # 95-625)

Tape-#	Name/Date/Place
MF-1	Mary Ann Martin. 25 November 1994. Maddox Cove.
MF-2/3	Heber John Keel. 4 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-4/5	Vera and Jabez Ryder. 5 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-6/7	Bride Fitzgerald. 6 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-8/9	Heber Keel. 8 and 9 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-10/11	May (and Wilson) Hayward. 10 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-12/13	Wallace Abbott. 11 December 1994. Bonavista.

MF-14/15	Laura Whiffen. 13 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-16	Phoebe and John Ryder. 13 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-17/18	Melita Guy & Iris Tremblett. 14 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-19	Fred Tremblett. 16 December 1994. Bonavista.
MF-20/21	Cornelius O'Brien. 30 March 1995. Witless Bay.

**Newfoundland Museum Tape Collection (NFM).
(MUNFLA Accession # 95-626)**

Tape #	Name/Date/Place
NFM-1	Clarence Sparks. 3 February 1993. Sibley's Cove
NFM-2	George Penney. 21 April 1993. Port Union.
NFM-3/4	John Deagen. 25 April 1993. Bay Bulls.
NFM-5/6	John Deagen. 19 May 1993. Bay Bulls.
NFM-7/8	Clarence Sparks. 31 May 1993. Sibley's Cove.
NFM-9	Clarence Sparks. 1 June 1993. Sibley's Cove.
NFM-10	Bennett March. 2 June 1993. Brownsdale.
NFM-11/12	Kenneth Saunders. 4 June 1993. Glovertown.
NFM-13/14	Bernard Martin. 8 June 1993. Petty Harbour.
NFM-15/16	Pius Power (Jr.). 19 June 1993. South East Bight.
NFM-17	Pius Power (Jr.). 20 June 1993. South East Bight.
NFM-18	Bill Joy. 3 August 1993. Bay Bulls.

NFM-19	Clayton Ralph. 10 September 1993. Port de Grave.
NFM-20	Reginald Eveleigh. 9 November 1993. Joe Batt's Arm.
NFM-21/22	William Brett. 9 November 1993. Joe Batt's Arm.
NFM-22/23	John Coffin. 10 November 1993. Joe Batt's Arm.
NFM-23/24	William Brett, etc. 10 November 1993. Joe Batt's Arm.
NFM-25	Victor Downton. 11 December 1993. Barr'd Islands.
NFM-26/27	Joyce Primmer. 13 November 1993. Barr'd Islands.
NFM-28	Roland Abbott. 14 November 1993. Musgrave Harbour.
NFM-29	Ettie and Ken Saunders. 15 November 1993. Glovertown.
NFM-30	Bennett March. 24 November 1993. Brownsdale.
NFM-31/32	Bennett and Ed March. 25 November 1993. Brownsdale.
NFM-32/33	Clarence Sparks. 25 November 1993. Sibley's Cove.
NFM-34	Robert Trimm. 26 November 1993. New Chelsea.
NFM-35/36/37	Wilson Hayward. 7 December 1993. Bonavista.
NFM-38/39	Willie John Randell. 8 December 1993. Bonavista.
NFM-40/41	Leo and Olive Pope. 9 December 1993. Grand Bank.
NFM-42/43	Roy Grandy. 10 December 1993. Grand Bank.
NFM-44	Janet and Stan Handrigan. 11 December 1993. Grand Bank.
NFM-45	Captain Bob Smith. 11 December 1993. Grand Bank.

Appendix 2. Transcription of John Downing's

**“The maner of catching and makeing
drie fishe in Newland.”**

[British Library, Egerton mss 2395, 565-566. 1676.]

This document was written by a prominent planter of Newfoundland, John Downing in 1676. He lived at the time of its writing in St. John's. Its descriptions of both harvesting and processing fish closely resemble descriptions (in various sources, including my own interviews in the 1990s) of these activities right up into the 1950s in Newfoundland. It makes for fascinating, if somewhat esoteric, reading.

These excerpts were made from two sources: a photostat of the original and another handwritten transcript of the original, both housed at the Maritime History Archive at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's. All spellings, punctuation, and so forth, come from the original. The document was written basically as one long paragraph, but I have split it into a number of paragraphs for ease of reading. The first section is about harvesting fish and the latter section concerns making fish. I have also added here and there in square brackets, punctuation and spellings that I also hope make the document more readable.

The Maner of Catching and makeing drie fishe in Newland.

In Each boate goes 3 men with foresayle and maynesayle in both 30 yards of
Canvace.
1 Roade of 60 fathom
& oares made in the Countrey

A drift of [f] the shoare the boates goe for to catch herrings with 4 or 5 netts fastened to the boats sterne post [...] there netts must be in the water to doe well before sunn sett and Remaine if herrings Enough be not taken[,] Stormes and Wind not hindering [...] till Sunn rising [...] Some nights by reason of winds and current to prevent driving on shoare or off[f] to[o] farr from shoare they hall there netts tenn times in a night Rowing to gett againe the shoare or to gett off[f] from it many times herrings being scarce they drive Everie night Each boates crewe from Sunday night to Saturday night resting onlie in ther beds onlie Saturday night Some rest not it: the dayes Except Sundayes they atend Cod Catching this toils is preformed in St. Johns and severall other harbors¹ if the caplein Taken in saynes [...] A ffish Like A smelt faild of coming according to its Custome as it did usualie seldome failing about Twentie yeeres past but since it Cometh not this Twentie yeeres as formerlie it hath not bene as fformerlie; onlie a Little some yeeres in some places it haith not been generallie in the harbours as afore neither some yeeres when in some harbours Could they Catch fish on it as before the fish Either not there following it as uauall or would not take it baited: it formerlie served the fiserhmen for baite in many harbors to kill fish Enough to make ther voyage: without using netts the Caplein stayed in some of the harbours where it ... ffrequented many times six weekes and all that while great fishing [,] Each fisher boate most dayes bringing in on thousand fishe per daye

the failing of the Caplein hath made the voyages the yeeres forementioned more toilsom [,] chargeable for netts and greatlie Lesse profitable: the quantities of fishe taken A great deale Lesse sold at dearer Rates by the Catchers and Lesse money gott: now usuallie the Current price neither highest price: nor Lowest on[e] yeer with the other 12 s per kintall formerlie 11 s yett then twice the quantitie taken of ... to Catch the Caplein forementioned we send a man for Each two fishing boats and with them man two or three boats with A Sayn in Each boatte which we Joyning together about 30 boats have our boats baited by the three boats: when the Caplein is Catcht they put it aboard our boats at Sea or in harbore Evenings or mornings with all speed² ~

Wee have 2 men A shoare to split and drie the fishe. Ashoare for Each boate on[e] man betwixt two boats goes for Caplain [...] three men in Each boate at Sea as forementioned who Ride casting out A killecke or graples to Ride by perhaps three

¹Note the reference to the steady hard work of the summer fishery. At the height of the season they are fishing day and night nearly seven days a week.

²This description is remarkably similar to P.K. Devine's in *In the Good Old Days!* (1990, 13-15).

or four miles or Lesse Either Side the harbour mouth some places halfe a mile off[f] the shoare fishing on Ledges - the Water Twentie fathom deep on them: Some lesse some a Little more [.] Each man ffishes with two lines Lengthened according to depth of Water they cann catch the fishe from three fathom to Thirti odd fathom: if they gett fishe by floats they have - no Leads and about foure fathom Each Line [.] some [of] them use Each man three Lines two hookes to Each [.] baited and many times A fishe to Each hooke: they cast Each man his Lines on[e] on on[e] side the boate the other the other Side.

if they cannot catch fishe on floats which they ordinarie doe not, then they have to Each Line a Lead about 2 [lb symbol] waight useing then but two lLines Each man [.] the boats begin to goe to Sea as soone as the Cod is knowne come and they readie [.] some yeeres it comes the first of Maye but Comonlie the midst of Maye [.] the best fishing comonlie in June they goe to Sea till about 25th of August [.] they bring in Some dayes on[e] thousand fishe and some dayes more some Lesse some dayes but Little which the Shoare men head take out the Liver of it for traynne and putt in ffatt [vat] for the Sun and heate to melt out: afterwards toone³ it in Caske [.]

they spilt [split] the fishe then Salt it in piles about 2 foote and halfe high and the same breadth on[e] A topp of the other: in ther stage which is built over the water so farr out from the Shoare as a boate may come to it Loaden [.] where the boate first heave up their fish out of ther boats this stage is covered with Sayle [.] haire cloth⁴, [.] boards, or rines to keepe from the fishe [.] while in Salt [.] Sunn or wett: After the fishe hath Layne in Salt two dayes or more as weather serveth its washed cleane with water out of the Salt and piled up for the water to presse out of it: the next daye if faire weather it is spread upon flakes neare ther stage [.] the flakes two foote high five foote broad coverd with small bowes or birch [.] Lieing playne as A Long table upheld by stakes two small rayles [.] A Crosse them small Sticks as smal[l]e as quarter staves [.] on these flakes the fish is spread the fishe side upward to the sunn [.] if drops fall on it turnd with all speed the skinn side upward for if the fishe side when ffirst or second daye spread be much wett its never almost good but spoyld discoulourd and stinkes [.]

the Sun Sometimes in hott calmes will frie the water that is in the fishe and make

³The word is very likely "ton" -- elsewhere in his documents, Downing quotes the price of train oil as "nine pound per toone." The meaning here, however, is unclear.

⁴"Haire cloth" was a material sometimes used for building.

it as if boyled and fall all to peeces some of it: everie night or time it raynes the fishe abroad to drie must be turnd the skinn side upward to prevent its being wett with Raine and deawes: in its first dayes going abroad onlie turnd at night before deawe falles: the skinn side upward [.] the next daye turnd at night & made up 6 fishes placed on[e] upon the other skin side upward and Laid So as no fish may Cover the topp of them Carring⁵ the Rayne most of the the rest [.] next daye it goes abroad again and so at night made up as afore but more putt together perhappes Twentie fishes: after its being dried foure or five faire days the greater fish Excepted because it askes by reason of thickness A Longer time of drieing [.]

the ordinaire fishe is piled at the End of the flakes in A round pile Contayning 40 Kintalls⁶ or Lesse in shape of a haye Cocke But orderly Layd to keepe the Rayne out the head made up with on[e] fishe so with the skinn upward Laping over on[e] other that at Last one fish Covers the topp and so kepes out raine from Entering it [.] there it stands till it sweate and become moist [.] then it is past abroad after its standing sometimes foureene dayes ... the moisture dried up then piled up againe perhaps two or three of them together⁷ and piled orderlie as afore then Covered with Sayles and five or sixe dayes after as oportunitie offers spread on flakes bowes or beach the skin upward after turnd the fishe upward in faire drie weather then the Leader of the fishe himselfe or Servants Lookes over all the fish [.] if any broken nett or ill made fishe apeare they throwe it out [.] the rest is [.] when dried to the Leaders minde or his Servants [.] weighed into boats and Carried aboard shipp.

S^r your Servant
J Downing

⁵This word is unclear.

⁶In margin of the transcription of the original is the phrase: "Called a press pile". The linguistic correlations to the 20th century salt fishery are remarkable. People told me that fish in these piles were said to be "in press."

⁷In the margin of the transcription is the following phrase: "Called a drie pile" in reference to this new large pile. The "two or three of them together" I assume implies two or three of the round piles together, making for a pile of potentially 120 quintals.

The nett fishe or Corfishe⁸ onlie Covered over with Salt and Lett drie with Salt and Lett drie till saved [...] after repoot into a squaire Pile out of the Salt 3 or 4 dayes afer waighed as is opertunitie offer

Endorsed 1676

⁸ "Corfishe" refers to undried or green (heavy-salted) fish, better known in modern times as "salt-bulk" (Story *et al.* 1990, 115).



