ICONOGRAPHY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND QUILT: PIECING TOGETHER MEANING ON THE GREAT NORTHERN PENINSULA

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Iconography of the Newfoundland Quilt:
Piecing Together Meaning on the Great Northern Peninsula

by Lisa Ann Wilson ©

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Abstract

The Newfoundland Quilt is part of a pervasive textile-based craft practice on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. This quilt type consists of between sixteen and thirty fabric blocks, each block containing an iconic symbol or scene that is of contemporary and/or historical relevance to outport Newfoundland. This thesis highlights some of the more commonly quilted icons in order to demonstrate the ways in which an individual might use a quilt's surface to express a range of regional values, nostalgic sentiments, and personal beliefs. In discussing these factors, this thesis also highlights quilting as a textile tradition in Newfoundland, by demonstrating the ways it has undergone shifts in form, function and meaning, as the culture itself has faced myriad changes. Since the majority of people who make these quilts are at a post-retirement age, this study connects quilting practices to advance stages of life, as the quilts become a way for older people to address the inevitable changes they have witnessed to their culture, to their physical bodies, and to the places that they call home. The Newfoundland Quilt type is therefore emblematic of the ways in which individuals use creativity to help generate and affirm of both individual and shared senses of identity, meanwhile helping them to confront the changes to the culture around them.

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I'd also like to thank friends and family for their encouragement, their editing help, and for being patient with me when I disappeared for months on end to write and research. My family in particular has been greatly supportive over the past two years, which will not soon be forgotten. Most importantly, I'd like to thank the forty-two craftspeople on the Great Northern Peninsula who invited me into their homes and showed me their collections of handmade objects. I'd especially like to thank all of the

quilters that I had the pleasure of interviewing. Each and every one of them shared with me their quilts, their skills, their opinions, and their life stories, with great openness, enthusiasm, and trust. They each made me feel respected and welcome, and I wish I could visit all of them again. I'd like to give a special thanks to Gwen Patey for being so kind, and for taking me through the entire quilting process, step-by-step, beginning to end. *Generosity* is one word that comes to mind when I think about Gwen, and all of the other quilters that I met during my fieldwork on the Great Northern Peninsula.

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(Altered from original source: http://www.mun.ca/mha/fpu/northern_peninsula.php)

Preface

When I first began this research I did not know that I would be focusing on quilts, nor did I realize the great potential they had as an object of study in Newfoundland. I had been living in the province for less than a year, and was not familiar with this regional tradition, how it had been practiced in the past, or how it is practiced today. When I arrived on Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula, my learning curve was steep—I found myself floating in a sea of unfamiliar dialect and vocabulary, customary behaviors, foods, beliefs, as well as observations and attitudes about the past, present, and future of the region, that I could never have accessed or researched from a distance. I saw the potential for this thesis when I was able to link what I was learning about the culture, and the many forms it took, to what I was seeing as far as textile-based crafts were concerned. I was on the Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) conducting fieldwork as an intern for the French Shore Historical Society (FSHS) based in Conche, along what is referred to as the French Shore, on the peninsula's east coast. My duty as intern was to conduct a "craft inventory" of textile products that are currently being generated in communities across the peninsula. This resulted in a collection of photographs consisting of approximately 2,500 craft items made by forty-two different craftspeople. These photographs, and their companion interviews, were to be used as foundational material for a new digital archive at the GNP Textiles Learning Center and Archives, an initiative spearheaded by the FSHS. The idea of the inventory, besides creating the base of a new archive, was to see what kinds of textile crafts people are making, what kinds they are *not* making, how the craftsperson acquired their textile skills, whether they have passed their skills down to subsequent generations, and whether or not they believe their skills to be a part of a

vanishing practice. Using this information, the hope is to create a learning center on the peninsula where people can come together to teach and learn traditional traditional textiles skills. The archive, together with this center, will ensure the longevity of textile-based craft traditions in this part of the province.

During my fieldwork visits, many different women showed me examples of what the craftspeople referred to as the Newfoundland Quilt. Some of these example quilts were in the process of being made; others had been completed in recent memory. The Newfoundland Quilt is a handcrafted quilt that is made by many women in this region of Newfoundland. It consists of between sixteen and thirty fabric blocks, with each block depicting an iconic scene or image from Newfoundland culture, history, and lifestyle. I did not recognize the symbolic importance of the Newfoundland Quilt until I realized how prolific it was, and fully grasped the way in which the women I interviewed regarded this quilt type with respect and pride. I had already been interviewing Northern Peninsula craftspeople for about three weeks before it dawned on me that the Newfoundland Quilt was in need of attention and exploration. Of the forty-two craftspeople I visited, twenty of them actively make Newfoundland Quilts. Of those who do not make them, many have one in their home, made by someone in the community.

Introduction: Rita's Quilt

The first time I encountered a Newfoundland Quilt was in Pines Cove, Newfoundland, inside the home of 84-year-old Rita Parrill. I met this life-long resident of the Great Northern Peninsula while conducting fieldwork along the Strait of Belle Isle, a geographic region on the northwest coast the GNP. Colloquially known as "the Straits," this coastal strip of land runs from the community of Plum Point in the south, to Eddies Cove East at the northernmost tip. I was looking forward to visiting this region of the peninsula and meeting up with Rita. I had heard that she worked with sealskin to make traditional sealskin boots and slippers—a practice that is thought to be in great decline. In fact, Rita has recently garnered attention for her boot-making skills, as she is considered one of the few remaining local practitioners of this tradition. This fact, in addition to her advanced years, made my visit with her feel very important. I wanted to learn as much as possible about how she acquired this skill, what materials she used, whether she passed the tradition down in her family line, whether she believed the practice to be "endangered" and finally, how she has perceived and coped with drastic changes to her coastal community over the years. Upon asking her some of these questions, I began to see that sealskin products, however important they are to regional history, were no longer her primary craft focus. While she still had many handcrafted sealskin objects to show, she no longer made them—Rita had moved on to other textile crafts. Like many others who make craft, Rita's skills and practices were not isolated to one medium—she could also knit, crochet, embroider, and quilt. Rita explained to me that she liked to challenge herself by making a variety of different kinds of craft types.

After photographing and talking about her sealskin boots, she walked me through the house and showed me some of her other craft objects. They were on careful display in the living room – a room that she decorated, and took pride in. Lace doilies sat protecting the hardwood dining table and crocheted pillows were arranged on the couch and rocking chair. I documented these objects, including two stuffed and mounted foxes that her husband had hunted, but that Rita was not fond of as decorations. When I was finished viewing the living room, I asked Rita if she had any quilts to share. She said that she did, but that said that she only had a few, as if to imply that she did not consider herself a quilter. The first was a Newfoundland Quilt, and unlike her other craft objects, it was not on display in the house. It wasn't hanging over the back of a couch, it wasn't covering the surface of a bed—this was not a quilt for using, it was for keeping. To show me her work, Rita gently pulled her quilt out from a closet and removed the clear plastic bag it was stored in. She then unfolded the quilt, laying it out on the floor in front of us (see fig. 2). I saw something that I wasn't expecting to see—the quilt had a familiar shape and design—conjoined and bordered square blocks—but the quilt's surface was new to me. Instead of exhibiting pieced or patchwork patterns, it was a quilt emblazoned with several isolated images. The images were not made from fabric, but instead rendered using fabric crayons. Each quilt block carried one of these crayon images. Her quilt had twenty images in all, five blocks across, and five blocks down. Among them was an image of an old-fashioned oil lamp with the Holy Bible next to it, a washboard and bucket, a woman hanging clothes on a line, a pair of sealskin boots, a woman stretching and drying sealskin, a fishing scene, and a fisherman mending a net. The drawings were not perfectly executed, but were carefully drawn nonetheless, and filled in with a bright mix of colors.

Rita (see fig. 3) made this particular quilt around five years ago and has kept it in storage ever since: "It is too nice to use on a bed," she told me. I was immediately intrigued by this quilt, and found myself drawn in by the representational images that were stored on its fabric surface. I looked closely at the way the pictures were drawn and colored in. Rita patiently stood next to me as I photographed each of the twenty icons. As I studied the quilt I began to query her on its origins. She tried to answer my deluge of questions but did not know what to say—Rita knew very little about the Newfoundland Quilt. She did not know who started making them first, or where the general idea came from. She did not know where her collection of patterns originated, many of which of her friends had passed along. She did, however, consider it a regional tradition, and although she could not recall when she first started seeing them, she determined that it was no more than twenty years ago. Yet with such little information, I was still able to recognize Rita's quilt as being part of a burgeoning quilting tradition on the Great Northern Peninsula, though I had yet to discover how pervasive it really is.

Rita's Newfoundland Quilt is representative of what Newfoundland Quilts generally look like on the GNP. Rita mentioned that she doesn't consider herself an artist but always makes slight changes to patterns to give them her own look. So while Rita's quilt is representative of the practice, hers is a unique take. This could be said of each and every quilt that I viewed during my fieldwork—each quilt looks the way it should yet each one is also its own creation. The quilt Rita showed me, composed of those twenty image blocks, is framed with a dark pink fabric. The images she included, while from patterns, were traced by her hand, and then colored according to her own ideas of what she thought the pictures should look like. The wide-range of images on the quilt are, in no

Fig. 2 – Rita Parrill's Newfoundland Quilt

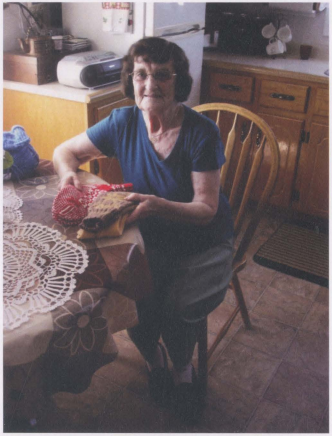


Fig. 3 – Portrait of Rita Parrill

small way, connected to life in rural Newfoundland, past and present. These images, due to their representative nature, become symbols on the quilt, or icons, reflective of an activity, object, or animal, taken from real life. Other examples of symbols appearing on her quilt include a snowmobile, a codfish, a child sliding down a hill, and a team of dogs pulling a sled. It is a safe assumption that the symbols appearing on this quilt were chosen by Rita according to her own observations and experiences of outport life on the Great Northern Peninsula.

Little did I know at the time, Rita's Newfoundland Quilt with its pink edging and crayon drawings, was the first of many such quilts that I would see during my fieldwork excursions. It took several visits with numerous textile craftspeople, back and forth across the entire peninsula, before I could see how widespread the practice is. Of twenty-seven quilters who were interviewed for the textiles inventory, twenty have recently made at least one Newfoundland Quilt. By documenting the quilts, and speaking to the quilters, I recognized three different styles of Newfoundland Quilt being made—the crayon or painted quilt, the appliquéd quilt, and the embroidered quilt. As I took notice of this quilting movement, my list of questions began to grow: Why are people making these kinds of quilts? How many people were practicing this tradition? How old is the Newfoundland Quilt? What determines whether or not a local practice is traditional? All of the quilters I will be presenting in this thesis do not just make the Newfoundland Quilt; they make other quilt types as well. Ranging from conservative to experimental, traditional to innovative, a GNP quilter will have a variety of quilt types to show off. Of the more "conservative" quilts, many are derivative of patterns familiar in the American quilting tradition. For example, pieced and appliqué quilts from this tradition appear on

the peninsula as the Log Cabin pattern (see fig. 4), the Star of Bethlehem pattern (see fig. 5), Sun-Bonnet Sue pattern, or the Flower Basket pattern. Deviating from this tradition are more innovative works that introduce new takes on old patterns and color schemes. Several examples of these quilts are somewhat "psychedelic" interpretations, using brightly colored, conflicting, patterned fabrics, and in one case, tie-died material. Yet these examples of conventional and unconventional quilts on the GNP, while exhibited with utmost pride by the quilters, do not seem to be conveying the same kinds of message as the Newfoundland Quilt. Even though they are considered an important dimension of local quilting practices, their regional relevance is not as acute. The classic iconography seen in the appliquéd Flower Basket Quilt may even be viewed as generic in comparison to the regional moose image that appears on many, if not all, Newfoundland Quilts. Quilters do not have as much to say about the flower basket motif as they do about the moose, because it is not as relevant to their everyday lives. While quilts from the American tradition are still "folk expressions" (Mullen 1992, 13) that employ specific craft skills, they do not outwardly carry the same kind of regional importance. The Newfoundland Quilt is an adaptation, a transformation, of older traditional forms, born from the need to express something unique. One can only assume, then, that if the Newfoundland Quilt tradition continues to gain momentum, perhaps being handed down to upcoming generations of quilters, it will surely go through the changes to form and style that all traditions seem to go through. Patrick Mullen in his book *Listening to Old Voices* (1992) reminds us of the transformative nature of tradition in the following: "Tradition is not a static construct; rather, it is a dynamic ongoing process of interpretation and reconstruction of the past (Mullen citing Handler and Linnekin 1984,

276)(1992, 3). Even though we do not know very much how the Newfoundland Quilt came to be, we can assume that it was an interpretive reconstruction of older forms, and we can also assume that it will be subject to further interpretation as it moves into the future.

Fig. 4 – Log Cabin Quilt made by Mary Elliott

Fig. 5 – Star of Bethlehem Quilt made by Naomi Wilcox

Methodology

When I arrived in Conche, my first task was to find individuals to speak with about their craft practices. At the beginning of my stay, the FSHS provided me an out-dated list of craftspeople living on the GNP, who work in various textiles. I began calling these individuals and found that while some had relocated, stopped making crafts, or passed away, many were still on the GNP and still making crafts. During my visits with the individuals on this list, I was often referred to friends, family and neighbors who make also crafts, and would be willing to speak with me. It was not difficult to find participants, as people tend to enjoy talking about the textile crafts that they make. In total, I visited forty-two residents, twenty of which make the quilt type that I am focusing on. It was important for me to focus on the GNP, rather than Newfoundland in general, due to the location of the proposed Textiles Archive and Learning Center. The center will be located here, in part due to the fact that it has a rich history of textile production. In times of great geographic isolation, Northern Peninsula residents carried traditional skills that helped them to meet specific needs. The information I gathered in interviews was meant to help identify which textile craft skills, specifically on the peninsula, are still in widespread practice and which are in need of documentation and protection. When I encountered a woman who primarily makes Newfoundland Quilts, I asked as many questions as possible related to this specific craft type, even if they make other crafts as well. These interviews are now stored as part of a textiles collection in two different archives. The FSHS in Conche has copies of each interview as part of their foundational collection for the proposed Textiles Archive and Learning Center. Another set of copies

is now available through the Digital Archive Initiative (DAI), an on-line archive hosted by Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN).

During the interviews, my preliminary line of questioning focused on three areas: first, how and why the Newfoundland Quilt was different from other quilts being made; second, why so many women were choosing to make them; and third, what the quilts themselves might be saying about the individual quilters and their collective communities. These questions follow closely a model of analysis that was established by preeminent folklorists working in Material Culture studies. In his book *Material Culture*, Henry Glassie postulates that "Material culture is culture made material…" and that the study of objects can aid us in understanding "human thought and action" (1991, 41). By looking at a quilt and the pictorials that the quilter has chosen to emboss, I can not only gain insight into the individual quilter's beliefs and intentions, but I can also approach the culture as a whole, and what possible meanings are being generated by the larger quilting community. A principal angle, then, in this study, will be a close look at the form and design of the quilts. Why are certain styles, colors, fabrics, and patterns chosen by the quilter? What kind of aesthetic decisions are at play? Linking together design and the individual, to the wider culture may offer information about some of the cultural attitudes towards life on the GNP, then and now. An important reference in conducting an exploration of the "material dimension" is David Pye (1968), who considers various structural aspects of form and design to find their broader, external meanings. Then, for a more specific understanding of design pertaining to quilts, I can look to Jonathan Holstein (1973) and Robert Bishop (1975). Their respective studies on American quilting

practices, including a study of types and techniques, can be readily applied to what I have encountered in Newfoundland practices.

In his article "The Concept of 'Aesthetic' in the Traditional Arts" (1971), Michael Owen Jones states: "To treat any work of art as simply an object, without regard for the processes of production and consumption, is to fail to understand the meaning of the art or the reasons for the formal, material, and expressive qualities that it exhibits" (Jones 1971, 102). Simon J. Bronner mirrors this prevailing perspective in his 1981 article "Investigating Identity and Expression in Folk Art", and by offering a research framework for folklorists to follow. The framework he delineates not only includes an observation of material objects, but also looks beyond the material dimension to include an observation of the maker. He explains what is known as the *behavioristic approach* in the following: "As the name implies, the behavioristic approach seeks to answer questions about the complexities of human activity, such as the creation of artistic objects, and the covert thoughts underlying such conduct. Thus researchers may ask: What drives people to create? How do people mediate between tradition and innovation? How does art reflect or distort everyday lives? How are personal standards and aesthetics determined?" (1981, 66). In order to begin answering such questions and to illuminate the unique strata of experiences, skills, beliefs, values, aspirations, and motivations, inherent to each artist, researchers need to center on specific individuals (Bronner 1981, 66). It is an analysis that involves not only assessing the materials, tools and techniques used in making the object, but also a comprehensive look at the social reality that the object was born out of, both in regards to the community, and to the individual maker. To avoid possible failures of interpretation, the voices of the quilters will be treated with utmost

importance, and will hopefully lead to the unraveling of any issues that I choose to present.

My need to employ a behavioristic approach is further affirmed when reviewing the material culture research conducted by Michael Owen Jones. Using a similar holistic approach, Jones was able to look at a single chair, handmade in the Appalachian region, to demonstrate how a range of meanings can begin to take shape through craft, and how these meanings can be interpreted. Simply put, he illustrates for the reader "…the way in which even designing and making useful objects may be a mode of expressive behavior" (Jones 5, 1975). So, even when an object is made for functional purposes, it may carry meaning to the maker much beyond that functionality. The quilt then, whether made from scraps for warmth or as an ornate keepsake, has always held a range of different meanings for the quilter. It can therefore be asked: how have these meanings shifted as quilts and their purpose transformed? What personal and cultural factors have contributed to this transformation? Jones also claims that by observing existing associations between a handmade object and an event in a person's life, the maker's favorable attitudes about the object—whether conventionally beautiful or not—and connected emotional responses, can become illuminated (1975, 233). He explains that these values and responses, produced in the maker, stemming from the object's connection to life experiences, might explain why a person wishes to possess that object, or as a possible reason for why they have endeavored to learn that mode of expression (233, 1975). With this in mind, it is important to listen to the craftsperson, allow verbal expressiveness to fill in the blanks of what the object is silently expressing, and evaluate accordingly. Here,

the role of memory and reminiscence, in connection with the handmade object, comes to the forefront.

Demographics and Research Queries

While this quilt is currently being made all over Newfoundland, this study focuses on those quilts made on the Northern Peninsula of the island, where perhaps they are being made as more of a movement than in other places in Newfoundland—at least, that is what the quilters themselves tend to believe. Having conducted twenty interviews with women who make the Newfoundland Quilt, I have access to an accumulation of different voices on the topic. Throughout the thesis, I will use direct quotes from the quilters I interviewed, taken from the recorded interviews I carried out. In doing so, the quilters' anecdotes, knowledge and beliefs—in relation to their craft, their communities, and their personal identities—will be integrated into this thesis.

Every quilter in this study is either close to or at retirement age, elderly, or approaching elderly status. They were all born and raised on the GNP, and whether traveled or not, have all chosen to live out the majority of their lives in or near their home communities. Each of them has been married for significant amount of time, with grown children and grandchildren. After visiting forty-two textile-based craftspeople across the peninsula, some who make quilts, and others who knit, crochet, or cross-stitch, I noticed a connection between life stages and craft production. The majority of women making textile crafts on the GNP are of retirement age and up, with only a few exceptions of women between thirty and forty-five. While this could, in part be due to the fact that younger individuals tend to leave their home communities to pursue careers in more populated and lucrative urban centers, it is also a widely recognized pattern in material

culture studies that older populations tend to turn to craft during post-retirement years. The noticeable emergence of this pattern on the GNP forced me to wonder: what is the connection between advanced life-stages and creative acts for women living on the GNP? Is there a connection between the Newfoundland quilt in particular, and life stages? What role does nostalgia and reminiscence play in this connection? I will approach these queries by providing an analysis of information gathered from the quilters themselves.

Relevant Northern Peninsula History

Melvin M. Firestone, who has written on traditional practices on the Great Northern Peninsula, offers a concise description of the geographic region I am writing about. He states, " The Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland, some forty miles wide, juts up 140 miles from the western side of the main body of the Island" (1969, 63). The central area of this arm-shaped mass is generally unpopulated, but for scattered cabins on ponds that are mostly used as summer residences and/or hunting and fishing retreats. This central area is also home to large numbers of moose, caribou, and other familiar Newfoundland wildlife. Along the western, eastern, and northern shores, several former fishing settlements constitute the human presence. The narrow shape and northern location of the Great Northern Peninsula give it a feeling of being separate from the rest of Newfoundland. Firestone claims that the road linking this extremity to the rest of the island was only built in 1962. To emphasize the history of isolation in this region he states that prior to 1962, "…since the coast was icebound from Christmas to the beginning of summer, it was a rare man who could make the trip by dog-team to Corner Brook" (1969, 69). Firestone, who was writing in the late 1960s, notes that it took even longer for roads to be built up to St. Anthony, at the northeast tip of the peninsula. At this

time, he wrote the following of St. Anthony: "Although strangers are not as rare as they once were before cars and snowmobiles appeared, they are still scarce and stared at. The values which existed in the previous period of extreme isolation are still strong" (1969, 69). Firestone's statement is outdated. This is certainly no longer the case in St. Anthony, but for some of the smaller GNP communities, it may still be like this. Strangers may still be stared at in places like Conche, Main Brook, or Flower's Cove—I know this from experience. Also, some of the values he is referring to are likely still present. Even though the overall consequences of isolation have been remedied in modern times, the *feeling* of isolation has not altogether vanished. Despite profound changes to transportation and accessibility to resources, there is a relentless feeling of isolation in these communities, possibly pronounced by low population density, and great geographic distance from urban centers.

Most people who live on the Northern Peninsula are from there, and can trace their family lines back for generations. They tend to feel closely connected to the land and their home communities. In fact, many of the quilters that I interviewed had never lived anywhere else. This however, is not the case for their children, many of whom have had to leave the Northern Peninsula, and many have left Newfoundland altogether. The lack of employment opportunities for youth contributes to this coming-of-age exodus. As Oliver Reid said to me in reference to local youth: "There's nothing for them here!" Oliver, like every other GNP resident I spoke to, was painfully aware that families could no longer stay together.

It was not always like this on the GNP—people used to stay home and live off of the plentiful natural resources, such as those provided from the cod fishery. Again,

writing in 1969, George M. Story describes the inshore and offshore waters around Newfoundland as " ...the great fishing grounds of the world" and goes on to describe, with wonderment, a regional ecosystem that supports populations of seals, whales, cod, herring, capelin, squid, and mackerel (Story 1969, 10). Story then offers us a common Newfoundland proverb: "Work in summer, play in winter," which speaks of a time when there was intense, habitual fishing activity every year from spring to fall (1969, 21). What Story could not know at the time is that these rich waters and the harvest they offered would not be sustainable for much longer. A fishery that had thrived from the 1480s onwards (Story 1969, 10), would go into decline in the early1970s, and eventually collapse under the watch of the very generation of people I interviewed for this thesis. The importance of this industry before its collapse is difficult to put into words. For many communities in Newfoundland, northern codfish was the primary reason for their existence, and the only economic basis for their sustainability (Sider 2003, 31). It was more than just an industry—it was a way of life. Anthropologist Gerald Sider in his book *Between History and Tomorrow: Making and Breaking Everyday Life in Rural Newfoundland* (2003) attempts to illuminate the vitality of the fishery by demonstrating how it created a shared cultural experience. He begins by explaining the role of social organization in culture making. He states that the fishing industry itself established a complex web of social ties that saw families, kin groups, and communities continuously shape and reshape alliances with one another (Sider 2003, 23). He then attempts to summarize the vast cultural response of such prolonged interconnections:

> From and around this continual reconstruction of ties emerged panoply of community rituals, customs, practices, and orientations—all that anthropologists call "culture." The cultures that emerged were widely shared around the island,

> and were also, simultaneously, deeply local constructing forms of belonging to specific locals (Sider 2003, 23).

As a folklorist, I might suggest that the folklore and folklife of GNP communities is inexorably linked to the fishing practices that sustained them for so long. From foodways, to customs and language, the fishery informed the culture around it. These communities, with their communal cultures, then watched as this way of life disintegrated. This unraveling came to a head in 1992, when the moratorium on cod fishing was officially put into place. Beginning with this ban, fishing villages that had been settled and built on the cod, struggled to redefine themselves. In terms of the overall impact of this great cultural change, it also may be too tremendous to put into words—it continues to unfold twenty years later. How then, in the face of such change, do residents respond? How can tradition help maintain a sense of identity?

While the life experiences and events that lead quilters on the GNP to start making Newfoundland Quilts varies, their shared story of recent years, at least in part, hinges on the cod moratorium. It was an event that over time has proven to have both a communal and an individual impact on Great Northern Peninsula residents. It is not surprising then, that the moratorium was referenced with great frequency during interviews. There is a sense that this event, whether recognized by individual quilters or not, may be a powerful motivator in the proliferation of this particular quilt type for Northern Newfoundlanders.

Quilting History in Newfoundland

Quilting in Newfoundland is considered a traditional practice. Women have been quilting here for generations, primarily based on a family's need for warmth. In the past, these quilts were not aesthetic pieces, but rather utilitarian ones, meant to serve a specific

function. In his monograph *Textile Traditions of Eastern Newfoundland* (1979b), Gerald Pocius describes the household conditions that necessitated these utilitarian quilts. He states: "Before modern heating devices were installed in most houses, a large number of quilts was required for each bed. Usually, seven or eight were needed to provide enough warmth after the kitchen stove had gone out each night" (1979b, 30). Several quilters I interviewed recalled the need for such quilts and it seemed to me that everyone of a certain age knew all about this older quilt form. A few people even explained the difference between quilts *then* and quilts *now*. Oliver Reid, the husband of a quilter I interviewed, explained: "Well, …way back, in Newfoundland, as far as I am concerned, you *had* to do it, you *had* to have it to keep warm. There was no option." His wife Marie then said, "It wasn't like this now," pointing to one of her quilts, "it was just scraps of materials." Due to limited resources in outport Newfoundland, these bed quilts were made from discarded clothing and other scraps of fabric. Pocius describes how this commonly made quilt was put together: "…four or five large pieces of material were sewn together to make this top portion. Quite frequently, these strips of material were randomly chosen, and little attention was paid to pattern or color" (1979b, 28). The backside of such quilts were made from readily available flour bags or worn out white t-shirts (1979b, 28). During my fieldwork, I heard mention of the "old flour bag quilt" many times. A few women even talked about watching or helping mothers and aunts make these quilts, and then making them on their own when first married. While no one had a utilitarian patchwork quilt to show me, they still had a place in the memories of the families I visited. Nowadays, this quilt type goes by several different names. Some quilters refer to them as "scrap quilts," others call them "old-fashioned patch-work

quilts," and others still simply call them "Newfoundland quilts." Indeed to some, these patchwork quilts are the *true* Newfoundland Quilt, as they were the ones that every mother would have made, and every household would have had and depended on.

The prevalence and importance of quilting and other textile traditions, in the past, in Newfoundland, is emphasized by Pocius in the following:

> The construction of textile artifacts in Newfoundland can be considered as a widespread community craft. Each household had to produce a certain amount of textile goods each year, whether mitts, quilts or mats. One or more women in the household would have the responsibility of producing these objects for family use. … The objects were necessary and had to be made, and their production was often looked up on simply as another household chore, like cooking or tending the kitchen garden (1979b, 62).

The need for handmade goods, including the utilitarian quilt, changed in outport Newfoundland when access to manufactured goods increased. This invariably altered how textile traditions would be practiced. Through a surge of creative innovation and pattern use, new forms have come in to replace the simple swaths of material seen in previous forms. This is a typical story in quilting history—other North American communities with strong quilting traditions have faced similar transformations. Robert Holstein, in his book *The Pieced Quilt: An American Quilting Tradition* (1973), explains the decline in quilting practices in 20th century America as a side effect of living in a post-industrial society. He states that "old hand ways" tend to go into decline as machines are invented to perform the same task (1973, 8). Or, he explains, such practices are simply eliminated when a society no longer values or depends on them (1973, 8). This explains a widespread decline in quilting on a need-basis, applicable to Newfoundland, but why then, do people continue to quilt even though they do not *need* to? Holstein provides a possible answer for this: "As industrial culture has expanded outward,

becoming ever more inclusive and committed to continual innovation, the hand-based skills of an earlier, more stable and static time become less significant in an economic analysis, but perhaps more meaningful emotionally as relics of a 'simpler' age" (1973, 8). Marie and Oliver stated that when they were young, "there was no option," alluding to times of scarcity and isolation. But they also recalled the happy days of their respective childhoods. Marie, thinking back on the "old days" said, "Times were tough, but we was happier then." It is likely that the continuance of quilting practices in the modern era may be an attempt to access these simpler, happier times. How does this relate to Rita? Is this partly why she makes textile-based craft objects? For Rita, as for the other quilters in this study, there is an array of plausible reasons for continuing to make craft objects despite the lack of need. These reasons may include Holstein's hypothesis, or quilting may simply be a way to pass the time, or just to have a creative outlet.

Before moving on, it is important to note another shift that has occurred in how utilitarian quilts were produced in comparison to how decorative ones are currently made. According to Pocius, at one time, textile crafts were a community activity, rather than an individual effort (1979b, 54). This was not only true of quilting, but also for mat hooking, as well as wool carding and spinning (1979b, 54). To make a quilt, a group of women from the community would gather, usually in the evening, in a friend's or family member's home (1979b, 54). Quilt making was an activity that required the hands of many people, and was a way to connect with friends, family, and neighbors. This is no longer the case. This community activity has become highly individualistic and in 1979, Pocius was already seeing signs of this shift. He states: "Social organization in most communities is beginning more and more to emphasize the individual, rather than the

family or a network of families. This social change, coupled with an increase in economic prosperity, has led to the decline and disappearance of many of the textile crafts practiced in the last seventy years" (Pocius 1979b, 52). He noticed correctly that social organization in outport communities was in the process of changing. During visits, I noted that quilting is not only an individual activity, but it can be a competitive one too. I only met one quilting group and even then, its primary purpose was to exchange ideas and enhance the skills of members working on *individual* projects. Women now make quilts as a solitary activity and since so few practice hand quilting the hand labour of many women is no longer required. The only exceptions to this individualization would be the quilting circle I mentioned, collaborations between two family members (i.e. mother/daughter), and people who hire someone to sew their quilt blocks together, none of which are uncommon on the GNP.

In addition, it also true what Pocius stated regarding the decline and disappearance of certain craft skills (1979b, 52). Decades later, there still appears to be a continual decline in the production of specific craft types—especially ones with utilitarian purposes, such as steamed-birch snowshoes and sealskin boots. In fact, the utilitarian quilt—the one made from discarded flour bags and old clothing—is now obsolete. It is a quilting tradition in Newfoundland that has seemingly vanished, seamlessly replaced by decorative works made by individuals using a mix of hand and machine.

Thesis Objectives

At the onset of this research project I was confronted with a number of questions that I hope to address in this thesis. After deciding to focus on the Newfoundland Quilt, the

first question that came to mind was: What is the value of studying an object such as this, which is considered traditional, but which has only been made for a relatively short period of time? Do these objects tell us anything about the quilters and their lives on the Great Northern Peninsula? What messages do the quilts themselves convey? As previously stated, my analytical approach will be two-fold; first, to look at quilt iconography and its possible meanings, and second, to listen to the quilters, interpret their stories, and give shape to their motivations. Are there any connections between the quilter's life stages and their craft making? If so, how are the quilts connected to memory? Are some symbols used to express nostalgia? Are others used to project regional identity? In answering these questions, I hope to find a specific link between craft and coping on the GNP. Given the social and cultural changes to outport life over time, and personal changes to the physical self as one advances in life stage, I believe that some individuals make Newfoundland Quilts as a way of confronting and overcoming some of these changes. I believe these research objectives are well within reach because as Mullen suggests, "The stories the elderly tell communicate a great deal about them and their cultures; folklore gives artistic expression to individual experiences of aging and also reveals broader social patterns of old age" (1992, 3). Beginning with snapshots of the quilter's lives, then moving into a discussion of how they approach the materiality of quilts, including possible meanings behind the icons they choose, and ending with a discussion on the social and cultural implications of the quilting process, I hope to demonstrate that the Newfoundland Quilt holds a significant range of meanings for both the individual quilters and the larger communities that they belong to.

Terms and Definitions

As a person ages they go through different stages of life that cannot be clearly differentiated, nor separated. Individuals experience these stages differently, and each stage often flows in to the next slowly, without notice. For this reason, it is important to give attention to some different life stages that people go through, as well as the terminology that helps us to talk about these stages. The expression *advanced life stage* is used by Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin in their book *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy* (1987), to indicate that a person has entered an unspecified age group, generally thought to be retirement age and older. Their study, which focuses on creative practices among elderly people in America, makes use of this descriptive phrase in order to include more age groups than just the elderly. It is important to consider using such open-ended terminologies because as stated by Hufford, "The threshold between middle age and old age… is by no means clearly demarcated" (Hufford et al. 1987, 18). "Advanced life stage" for me, is an umbrella expression that I will use to describe the late 50s plus, or as a general way to indicate any age group that has faced to varying degrees changes to the social/cultural environment with age, as well as changes to the physical body. For those on the younger end of the scale I will sometimes use the expression *retirement age* but it is important to keep in mind that not all of the quilters are fully retired. There is a range of life stages in later life that are not definitive, yet still have commonalities. Doucette in her dissertation *The Emergence of New Expressive Skills in Retirement and Later Life in Contemporary Newfoundland* (1985) found a similar ambiguity regarding the definition of the age groups in her research. She addressed this by stating: "Not all of the informants are advanced in years, nor are they all officially

retired. But all, by one means or another, have passed into a different life stage, and that is the common denominator" (1985, 7). This is very much the case in terms of my own research with the GNP quilters—they have each entered a life stage that has drawn them to their craft-making, whatever that life stage may be. I also like how Doucette reserves the term *young old* to talk about people in their fifties/sixties, and *elderly* to talk about people 70s to 90s, who may or may not show the physical makers of "elderly" status, but who are certainly at a more advanced stage that those who more recently retired (1985, 7). It should be noted however, that in some cases, I do not know the exact age of the quilter. I learned quickly that some people do not like to be asked how old they are. When I encountered someone who was clearly elderly, I felt comfortable asking, as age is a point of pride at a certain point. Women in their fifties and sixties, on the other hand, were less forthcoming. Despite this, "young old" individuals provided other indicators of age, such as work/retirement history, number of years married, or the age of their children and grandchildren. Particularly for these individuals, I will mostly use "retirement age" or Doucette's expression "young old" as they both help maintain an ambiguity that is only fair to the women who were protective of their actual ages with me.

Another term that I will be borrowing from Hufford et al. is that of *life review* or, *life review process*. This process revolves around how people at advanced life stages tend to reflect on their life stories and seek means of expressing parts of this story: "Autobiographies and memoirs are not always found in books… They emerge on canvas and in wood, on fabric and in stone. They may be constructed and narrated collaboratively or individually. No matter how it comes about, telling one's story seems

an essential part of being an elder, and culture provides an array of expressive forms for putting one's story forth" (Hufford et al. 1987, 41). By way of actively correlating icons on the quilts to the voices of the quilters, I intend to show how memory and reminiscence are involved in the quilting process. The visual representations of these memories, as seen in the Newfoundland Quilt, deem this quilt type a direct example of this "life review process." It is a term that Patrick Mullen uses too, as he approaches tradition-bearers to share with him reminiscences from their lives. He points out that life review is often part of participating in traditions that are important to the particular family or larger community (Mullen 1992, 23). He believes that such traditional activities help people at advanced life stages to experience engagement and continuity (1992, 23). These are themes that I have been able to apply to GNP quilters, as indeed their engagement with traditional textiles, in their innovative or conventional forms, may be an attempt for continuity in times of drastic life change, on both a personal and cultural level.

To make clear why quilt making is considered a traditional practice on the GNP my use of the word *tradition* should also be addressed. In this, I also hope to illuminate what the concept of a *new tradition* might mean, and how new traditions may be accepted and integrated into a community. Henry Glassie in his piece entitled "Tradition" (2003), discusses traditional activities in terms of how they are a process of "creating" by way of employing elements of the past, thereby asserting continuity while moving into the future (2003, 177). He states, "If tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity…" (2003, 177). Glassie also warns us against giving tradition a simple definition. He describes tradition by illuminating its manifold nature:

> One person, feeling tradition deserves no place in the brave new world of legal procedure, characterizes it as static. Another, favoring diversity, asserts a place

> for tradition in modern life by calling it fluid and shoving it into the maelstrom of negotiation and emergence. But tradition can be static, and it can be fluid; it can whirl in place, revolving through kaleidoscopic transformations, or it can strike helical, progressive or retrograde tracks through time (2003, 188).

Tradition can take on the form of a survival from the past, but it can also acquire new forms, and evolve into the future. Keeping his warning against simple definitions in mind, what exactly *is* tradition?

Doucette encountered a similar impulse to define *tradition* for her readers. She clarifies her use of the term in the following: "Within this study the term "traditional" is used in the sense of being part of the informant's home culture, the informal customs, practices and lore of the family and community. For some of these people, that means Newfoundland outport life of the early 20th century, and a general but not absolute maintenance of older patterns of economic and social behaviour" (1985, 6). Her definition is applicable to my study as she is coming from the same perspective of trying to understand creativity among people in advanced life stages in Newfoundland. Indeed from this perspective, quilting *is* a traditional activity. However, I'd like to open up some of the tentative boundaries that she put into place. Her larger context regarding outport life in the early 20th century, and "older patterns of social economic behavior," must be broadened for my purposes. Although I conducted fieldwork with a similar demographic in terms of age, this study was started exactly twenty-five years after Doucette was writing her dissertation. Her informants therefore would have been of a precedent generation. The "customs, practices, and lore" that my informants grew up with would certainly been informed by early 20th century culture, but for them, it is the mid-century era that would have had the strongest impact as far as informing them about the traditions they choose to practice. It is difficult to say whether or not quilting traditions changed

very much over the course of the early to mid 1900s in Newfoundland, but they certainly went through change during the modern industrial era that began to hit isolated northern outports in the late 1960s. Once roads and electricity were brought to these communities, access to consumer goods was heightened. It has already been determined that these factors would have influenced quilting practices. Some time after this, the moratorium on cod fishing motivated another cultural shift. This would have also had an impact on how traditions were practiced. This shift occurred after the point that Doucette was writing, so opening up her timeframe to place emphasis on the mid-century and beyond, is a minor but important change. Taking notice of how traditions undergo change in the hands of those individuals and communities who practice them, as well as the cultural moments that motivate the shifts in form, is as telling as the tradition itself.

Finally, there is also a range of design-related terminology that I have decided to use throughout my discussions. To begin, *design* is a word that can be used in several different ways, indicating different parts of the quilting process. *Design* can involve color choices and pattern choices, as well as how a quilt is put together. It is a broad term that I will use when talking about how the quilt's finished look appears, and what choices the quilter made to put forward that appearance. This is the "overall design" of a quilt—a combination of decisions made throughout the process that lead to a finished product. Then, there are three different aspects of quilt design that must be identified in order to help clarify what part of the design process is being touched upon. First, I will use the word *type* to identity what kind of quilt is being made. This helps to talk about the kind of overall pattern that has been chosen by the quilter. Is it a Star of Bethlehem quilt, a Polar Bear quilt, or a Newfoundland Quilt? Secondly, I will use the word *pattern* to talk about

how the images on the quilt are arranged, as well as the images themselves. The Newfoundland Quilt follows an "album pattern," with each quilt block meant to look like a page in a photo album. Then, each quilt block image in itself, is also considered a pattern. Finally, I will use the word *style* in reference to how the quilt pattern is being made. Is it appliquéd, embroidered, pieced, or painted? It should be noted that all of these terms, to some degree, are interchangeable. For instance, the Newfoundland Quilt in general, can be considered both a type and a style of quilt. Also, the album pattern may also be referred to as an album "type" or album "style" quilt. Despite the flexible nature of this terminology, I will largely use "type" to identity overall quilt designs, and "style" indicate how the quilt type was made.

Limitations of this Research

Due to my fieldwork objectives—to document and discuss a *range* of textile-based craft objects—there are limitations to the research I will be presenting. First and foremost, I had few opportunities to interview individuals exclusively about Newfoundland Quilts. The quilters I visited were excited to share information about a variety of crafts that they make, so the recorded conversations inevitably drifted to other topics, other skills, and other craft types. Prominent folklorists, who have come away from their fieldwork without a cohesive plot or a definitive theme to their interviews, have addressed such digressions. Patrick Mullen for instance, had to concede to the fact that the elderly people he was visiting would steer the conversation rather than the other way around. Of his interviewing experience he states, "…older people generally want to tell their life stories, but they do not always have a receptive audience. To the folklorist, it is as if elderly persons are waiting for someone to come along and ask for their stories, and the folklorist

had better be a good listener. The interviews were usually non-directional; I asked some questions but let the individual establish the direction and specific topics to be discussed" (1992, 7). This is very true of my own interviewing experience and, for this reason, the voices presented in this thesis will tune in and out throughout, according to themes they presented to me, and ones I have chosen to exhibit. The stories, reflections, and opinions they presented to me will not always be complete, nor will they be detailed in the way I would have wished. For this same reason, there will not be a lengthy biographical component to thesis, as the biographical information provided by the quilters was often fragmented, appearing in conversations only when prompted or when relevant within the context of the quilt we were discussing. Having said that, any relevant information provided by the quilters will be presented whenever possible

A second limitation to my research lies in the physical analysis of specific quilts. Laurel Horton in her book *Mary Black's Family Quilts: Memory and Meaning in Everyday Life* (2005) includes a rigorous analysis of each quilt in her study. She includes information such as quilt dimensions, colors, fabric types and origins, specific quilting stitches and techniques, and the dates that the quilts were made. This complete study of a quilt, in conjunction with her analysis of the socio-cultural conditions that contributed to a quilt being made, gives her work a dynamic quality that any researcher would hope to replicate. While I have been able to explore my data from a similar behavioral approach, during my fieldwork there was little opportunity to spend significant time studying a whole quilt and its physical properties. In the process of documenting multiple objects, and having conversations about these objects, it was not possible to measure each quilt and give special attention to its individual features. However useful this might have been,

the fact that this particular kind of quilt is pictorial, with many meaningful symbols on its surface, there is sufficient material to analyze based on the images alone. So, instead of being able to present a holistic study of the Newfoundland Quilt, I have had to select specific features of the quilt based upon the information that I *was* able to gather. The specific symbols I have selected for were chosen based on the frequency with which they appear on different quilts, and how they reflect aspects of the quilters' lives and personal experience narratives.

Getting a Grasp on Quilts

After viewing around twenty-five Newfoundland Quilts, and speaking to the women who made them, I realized the important place they hold as both an object *and* a practice on the GNP. It is a craft that many women choose to take up in later life, in response to cultural changes around them, such as the demise of the fishery, as well as changes they experience in the process of aging, such as retirement. As these factors became apparent to me, I started to turn my interest towards the reflections and attitudes that quilters had not only in regards to their craft, but also their personal experiences around growing up on the GNP, making ends meet, raising children, observing cultural change, how they found their craft, and how this craft might be connected to the other parts of their life experiences. When I took time to listen to the quilters and find out how they perceived these different facets of life, I realized that in the act of making a quilt, a woman is actively making choices, expressing herself, engaging in a tradition, giving her life a sense of purpose, and telling part of her life story.

I

Portrait of a Quilter

In order to have a greater understanding of GNP quilting practices, it is first important to look at the lives of the quilters who have chosen to proliferate the Newfoundland Quilt tradition. This section aims to introduce the six primary Northern Peninsula quilters whose invaluable information will be used throughout my discussions. Three of these quilters happen to be from the community of Roddickton, while the other three are from different regions of the GNP. When selecting quilters to focus on, I was attentive to each quilter's place of residence, but this was secondary to my other considerations. First and foremost, I looked at the quilts themselves. Did this quilter make a Newfoundland Quilt representative of what other quilters are making? Do the quilts demonstrate the different aspects of this quilting movement that I hope to discuss? Essentially, each of these six quilters is notable for the unique or aesthetically interesting quilts she produces while staying true to this overall crafting movement. A second consideration, and perhaps even a more important one, is the quality of information that these individuals were willing and able to share with me during the short amount of time I spent with them. This information will account for the oral historical and personal narrative component that this thesis so thoroughly depends on. Here, I will offer some brief community and biographical details next to a discussion around where/when they acquired their quilting skills, certain attitudes they might have about quilting, and how they practice their skills. More detailed discussions around pattern use, fabric choices, beliefs about the quilts, and the motivations that drive them, will be given directed attention in subsequent sections of this thesis.

Before moving into the profiles, it is important to note that in various discussions, I will inevitably reference some of the quilters and craftspeople I chose *not* to profile. Even though I have had to curate the information I exhibit from my informants, each of the quilter's voices is equally important, and whenever possible, a range of these voices will be presented. At times, I will also offer the reflections and experiences of people who engage in other types of craft—perhaps even men, who have never even darned a sock, let alone made a quilt. The reason for pulling these ostensibly inappropriate voices into a discussion is to demonstrate how some of the motives for making the Newfoundland Quilt are transferable to other craft types. Or it may be that an individual craftsperson, regardless of what they make, has voiced an experience that is pertinent to the collective GNP experience—an experience that is highly relevant to the iconography that appears on the quilt tops. While the quilts may carry personal messages, meaningful only to the individual who made the quilt, there is also a collective cultural experience that is being played out, one that supersedes the boundaries of the quilt blocks.

For example, in discussing why images of a dog-team frequently shows up on Newfoundland Quilts, it will be impossible to ignore Laura Chamber's personal accounts, even though she stopped making quilts several years ago, and has never endeavored to make a Newfoundland Quilt. By placing all these voices next to one another, a collective story of the region will unfold alongside any individual reflections and motivations of specific quilters. The importance of valuing such shared cultural experiences, and tracing how they influence our creative expressions, is stressed in the following statement made by Hufford et al.: "Over a lifetime, individuals create and share different kinds of traditional expressions. In each stage of life we respond to certain developmental tasks

and shared cultural experiences" (1987, 17). In stopping to take notice of how and why individual members of a community are choosing to express themselves, we gain insight into myriad facets of life on the GNP. Hufford, Hunt, Zeitlin encourage us, as folklorists to stop and take notice of different individuals, reminding us of the greater insights we might gain: "…the elderly are not just repositories of old culture, but vigorous makers of culture. With imagination and verve they tackle the challenges of living, busily weaving out of the threads of biography, history, biology, tradition, and everyday living their particular and communal visions of life" (1987, 35). They stress the importance of focusing on "the individual" in understanding what the shared "vision of life" might look like. Even though I will be shining a spotlight on comparably few quilters, those other voices of other crafters will appear, and together a more communal story, rather than strictly personal ones, might be tapped into.

Myrtle Lewis

Myrtle (see fig. 6) was born in, and still lives in Roddickton, an inland community that neighbors Conche on the eastern section of the peninsula. Although she did spend a number of years working and living in St. John's, she has always considered Roddickton her home. She lives with her husband, and her brother-in-law, who is a dependent that Myrtle cares for. Aside from this duty, Myrtle Lewis is a sixty-three-year-old retiree, who is both a mother to five children and a grandmother. Her adult daughter Debbie assists her with her care-giving duties, which works well because they are accustomed to working together; Myrtle and Debbie are also collaborators on Newfoundland Quilt making. Debbie paints images onto the fabric blocks, and Myrtle does the quilting and

sewing. When Myrtle makes a quilt without Debbie, it is usually in the appliqué style, rather than the painted style.

Myrtle has been married twice in her life, and all of her children are from a first marriage. It was a marriage that ended in an untimely fashion. She summarized her domestic situation for me with practiced simplicity: "I got married '64. He died, so I married to a guy from Conche after. I have five of my own, with my first husband. Three boys and two girls." The ups and downs of her life were shared in a steady voice, not dramatizing difficult events, but rather stating them as facts from her life.

My first impression of Myrtle is that she was warm and familiar, referring me to as "my ducky" as soon as I entered her waterfront home. "My ducky" is a common term of endearment in Newfoundland, but this was the first time I had ever heard it. Consequently, the term endeared *her* to me, rather than the other way around. Myrtle started off the interview by explaining that she first took up quilting to help her get through an illness, which she has since fully recovered from. She explained that she began quilting around the time that she began to feel better: "A year after, when I was getting on the mending end, I said 'Well, I gotta do something!' So this is what I started at." Although her mother had made patchwork quilts when she was growing up, Myrtle did not learn quilting skills until this later point life when she had to "do something." When I asked if someone had helped her learn how to quilt, she explained:

> Well, my mom used to make what you'd call the old fashioned quilts, with the patches… but no, on my own, and when I started off at first, you figure out how to put together a quilt, how you're going to do it, and it was hard. So I said 'There's got to be an easier way to do it than that!' So then I started and it got easier, you know. In the last couple of years, as a matter of fact, we've been teaching quilting in Englee. There's ten or twelve of them that goes, in the Salvation Army Church. My daughter helps with it.

She describes the trajectory of her quilting skills as they move from childhood observation, to trial and error attempts as an adult, to improvement with practice, and ultimately, to being able to share her skills with others. Aside from watching her mother make patchwork quilts in her youth, Myrtle is an entirely self-taught quilter. Even though she developed this skill in a time of need, it did not fall to the wayside as her health improved. These skills had found an enduring role in her life; they firmly anchored themselves. As her quilting became habitual, she decided to teach her daughter Debbie how to quilt, and soon enough they became a quilting team.

At the time of my visit, Myrtle's home was undergoing a major renovation, and had been laboring on these home improvements. Because of the nature of this work, Myrtle described her herself as a "jack-of-all-trades" and referred to her quilt-making as "more of a pastime." Before retirement, Myrtle was involved in the Home Care industry, a line of work that gave her a great sense of purpose, yet did not impact her love of sewing. When discussing her love of sewing, she is inspired to talk about the work she did before retiring:

> I'd work right on through, but still when I got home, I loved to sit down at the sewing machine. I worked at St. Pat's Nursing home for 9 years—I was the director of housing there, and then I worked in Chamberlains, Cherry Lane Manors, personal home care. So when I came back out here in 2006, I worked up to the home right here, personal home care. So that's what I worked at almost all my life.

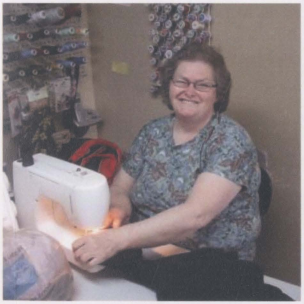

Left: Fig. 6 – Portrait of Myrtle Lewis
Right: Fig. 7 – Myrtle Lewis' Newfoundland Quilt

Myrtle only had two different quilts handy to show me, neither of which were of the Newfoundland Quilt type. One was a Graduation Quilt made for her granddaughter, and the other was a Family Tree quilt. This latter quilt consisted of multiple appliqué hearts, from red fabric, with family member's names written in fabric paint in the middle of each heart. This quilt was made as a tribute to her family—each of her five children was given one as a gift. As mentioned, Myrtle does not paint Newfoundland Quilts, although she does construct quilts from painted blocks made by her daughter Debbie. However, I did see an appliqué quilt made by Myrtle when visiting a craftsperson in Conche, who had purchased it from her some years before (see fig. 7). The owner of the quilt had it on display, on a bed in the spare room of the house. I studied it and could tell, by some of its aesthetic qualities, that it was in fact, made by Myrtle Lewis. Like her other quilts, her images were loose renditions of available patterns. Her fabric and color choices were not always what one would expect, and overall there was an originality to the quilt that drew me in. Myrtle no longer makes these appliqué style quilts, instead

allowing her daughter to decide on the imagery, and render it according to her own ideas of what the icons should look like. Doubtless however, is that part of Myrtle and her individualistic taste and style, is imprinted into each and every quilt they make together.

Naomi Wilcox

Naomi (see fig. 8) is a professional seamstress who, like Myrtle, lives in Roddickton. She was born and raised in the region, and would not live anywhere else. I first heard about Naomi after seeing one of her Newfoundland Quilts that a nearby resident had purchased as a keepsake. Naomi's quilt was in an appliqué style, and demonstrated skill, technique, and a precise use of icon patterns (see fig. 9). After viewing her quilt, I was told where to find her, and immediately went for a visit to her sewing shop. When I pulled up to her house, I saw a small "OPEN" sign hanging in on the basement door of her two-story home. I let myself in and upon hearing the door chimes, she looked up from her sewing machine. After explaining why I was there, Naomi became eager to share her quilt projects with me. She had so many to show, in fact, that I had to make a second visit, to complete the documentation process.



Left: Fig. 8 – Portrait of Naomi Wilcox

Right: Fig. 9 – Naomi Wilcox's Newfoundland Quilt

Naomi primarily makes pieced and appliquéd quilts, but sometimes embroiders imagery too. Her quilts range from very traditional in appearance, to more innovative takes on traditional forms and patterns. She explores color and pattern in a refined yet approachable way that I had not yet seen before. She not only designs her own quilts, but she also pieces together quilt concepts for other people. Naomi's small sewing operation was established in 2001, after attempting to start a larger business. This initial plan had "too many headaches" attached, and so she just started sewing in her house. She explained the benefits of working for herself, on her own terms:

> I set this up, me own. I just took up this sewing. If someone wants to bring something in, it is fine, and if they don't, it is still fine. If I got nothing to sew, it is still fine. If I wants to shut down, I'd shut down just like that, I owns it. And I go to the cabin, go off fishing, if we want to go up coast for a day, a couple days, whatever, we do it.

By the time she opened up her shop, sewing was already one of her predominant skills. After the moratorium, when Naomi was laid off at the fish plant, she began working for a local lady who had a sewing shop. She told me of this work history in a fairly concise manner: "Fish plant. I worked on the fish plant, worked on the crab plant. When the moratorium went on, see, we got laid off, and that was it. I worked at a sewing shop. I worked there for four years." Now, with her own shop, one of the things that she does is put together other people's quilts. "Now, I didn't do this," she explained, "I just put these together. These are other people's. Oh yeah, I do all of it. I do anything and everything. Anything that people want, I do." When I asked if she felt like a little piece of her went into the quilts she pieced for others, she agreed that it did, but stressed that the quilts were "done" by her customers. With that, I realized that for quilters, the most important part,

where most of the meaning is generated, is in the design and execution of the quilt blocks. After those are done, it seemingly does not matter much who sews the quilt together.

Naomi has been making quilts for forty-four years or, ever since she was first married. When I asked if anyone had taught her how to quilt she said, "No, I just picked it up on me own." Her mother, who made quilts, taught her some basic sewing skills but, as Naomi was sure to mention, they were a different kind of quilt back then. She told me, "Mom just made the plain material ones like, no patterns onto it." Of course, in her mother's time, quilts were made solely for utilitarian purposes, and the decorative aspect would not have been a priority for her. So Naomi first learned to sew as a child, and then began making quilts when she got married. She also proudly informed me how that to this day, she makes all of her own clothing. "I make everything," she said, "from your head to your feet. I made this top and I made this dress."

Naomi then told me a little bit about her married life: "My husband is retired, he's over sixty-five. He been sick for years. He had to retire in an early retirement in '95, on account of the disease he had. He's okay. He can't work very much, but he's okay." The two first got married on August the 17th, forty-four years ago. After telling me this, she said to me with a smile, "Long time, isn't it? Not too many of me this day and age now is there? You wouldn't believe when I got married at." I could tell by the way she was talking that she likely got married at a very young age, but I would not be prepared for her answer. "Oh, were you young?" I asked. She told me that she was just fourteen years old. Her husband was twenty-one, but she was fourteen. They had their first of five children when she was just fifteen years old. Thinking back to how she taught herself

how to quilt when she got married, I realized that she was still a child at the time. Now, she is at a "young old" life stage, eagerly facing her retirement.

Before ending the interview, I asked Naomi if she ever had the opportunity to teach her children how to make quilts. She shook her head no and said, "They can't stand it! They see me doing that much of it and they don't like it [laughter]. Yeah, they don't like it whatsoever." Naomi did not seem too disappointed that her daughters have not shown interest in learning these traditional skills, and it was a given that her sons have not taken up the skills either. In quilting, there appears to be an unspoken understanding that only women would ever learn this kind of traditional skill. Either way, Naomi is comfortable with her children's lack of interest in quilting. Perhaps she feels that she does enough quilting for the whole family.

Gwen Patey

Gwen Patey (see fig. 10) is from St. Lunaire-Griquet on the GNP, but now lives in nearby Quirpon. At the time of my visit, she had been living in Quirpon for thirty-three years, as this is her husband Scott's home community. Gwen is a retired fish plant worker who now makes quilts as a serious hobby. She makes them to keep herself busy, to give as gifts for two adult daughters, and based on commission orders that she receives from community members. While she takes it very seriously, she enjoys the process, and if she does not have enough to work on, she starts feeling restless. Gwen turned out to be an invaluable informant for me. We had three separate visits together—one of which centered on discussing her skills, while the other two focused on observing her quilting methods and techniques. She is a very patient teacher who has strict ideals about form

and style, and is not afraid to voice her opinion when a quilt is in violation of these standards.

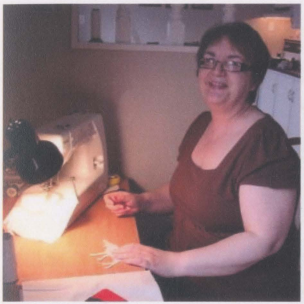
Scott used to be a fisherman, but now works as a manager at the fish plant in Conche. Since it is seasonal work, Gwen and Scott reside in Conche for certain parts of the year, which is where I first met her. Their Conche home is modest and sits next to the large, grey fish plant building. Their home in Quirpon, which I also saw, is at the northern tip of the community, past an old graveyard, at the dead end of an ocean-side road. It is a fairly stark and isolated location. In recent years, Quirpon has been noted, not for its growth, but for how it is drastically shrinking in size. When I asked Gwen what her experience living in Quirpon has been like, she said the following:

> It is nice, it is quiet. Everyone is pretty friendly. You just stop by and say: "Put on the coffee pot, I've come for a coffee." But, it is sad that it is dying. Very sad. When you look around, you've got like, 80% of the peoples that's there are seniors. We're probably some of the younger ones, and our family is grown and gone. Like, I'm in my 50s and I'm pretty much one of the younger people that's in Quirpon right now, so that's telling you.

Gwen appreciates the sense of togetherness of the community, and hopes for a different future for Quirpon than the one predicted. Like other residents of Quirpon that I spoke with, the future of the town looks even quieter than the one they live in currently. There are no young families around to rejuvenate feelings of continuity—there seems to be no way of handing down the sense of place that they ascribe to their home. In the face of this discontinuity, with grown children, and at a retirement age, Gwen Patey makes quilts. Her work is crisp, technical, and aesthetically sound. She makes appliqué Newfoundland and Wedding Quilts, as well as a wide array of pieced work from the American tradition (see fig. 11). At any given moment, Gwen has two or three quilts on the go, but admits that two is probably better, as any more is overwhelming. Given her noticeable textile

abilities and aesthetic sensibilities, I asked her to talk about when and how she first learned textile skills. She took me back to when she was a small child:

> Knitting probably when I was five years old. My dad was a fisherman, the women did the fish, so while they were gone to put the fish out on the flakes, or whatever, she would set us down with a needle and thread, or knitting needles and wool, kept us occupied while she was gone. Like, from when I was 10 to about 13 years old, I did embroidery for Grenfell Handicraft, and that's how I had spending money as a child.



Left: Fig. 10 – Portrait of Gwen Patey
Right: Fig. 11 – Gwen Patey's Newfoundland Quilt

What I find most interesting is that even though textiles are not explicitly connected to Newfoundland's fishery history, the development of her skills are inherently linked to her parent's roles in the fishery. When she says "women did the fish" she is referring to the fish preparation process, including salting and drying, which were considered women's tasks. What started off as a way to keep her busy as a child, moved into a way to make some extra money—something that she employs her textile skills for to this day. She talks about how her money-making relationship with textiles began, also addressing what doing embroidery for Grenfell Handicrafts consisted of:

> I embroidered parkas, tablecloths. You picked them up at Grenfell Handicraft, because you didn't get to St. Anthony every day back then, like a whole day was missing when you went and came back, and you'd pick up maybe enough to keep you occupied for a week. So If I went up the next week, I would take mine, plus several other people's to bring back. Everything [the patterns] was all stamped on. When they give it to you, they have it stamped. …I think *that* art is going out as well.

At the end of this description, she mentions that she thinks the art of embroidery handicrafts is dying off and that people are no longer learning this skill. When she says "as well," it occurs to me that she also believes quilting to be a vanishing practice. This could be because neither of her daughters make quilts, and have no interest in learning these skills, or it could have to do with the fact that traditional practices, such as quilting, are no longer essential. From her perspective, it may appear that these skills are endangered, even if large numbers of people are practicing them. But what would likely comfort her is the fact that traditions do not easily die, but rather face transformation: "While historically certain practices may end, traditions evolve, adapt and merge as groups share and continue them" (Sims and Stephens 2005, 76).

Marie Reid

Marie Reid (see fig. 13) is a self-taught quilter who has been married to her husband Oliver for forty-six years. They got married when she was just seventeen years old, and he was nineteen. They were both born and raised in Roddickton, and settled here after they married, to begin their life together. Oliver heavily figured into my interview with Marie, in part, due to his vested interest in her quilting practices. He helped her pull each quilt out from its storage bag to show me, and he helped hold them up for me to view. He was well acquainted with the entire quilting process, and the kind of skills that are required in such a practice. When I asked where she learned how to quilt, Oliver piped in

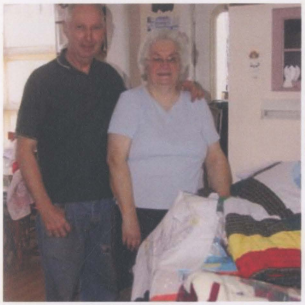
before Marie could even answer. "No training," he exclaimed, "she just knows!" Marie backed this up by saying "I just sit down and go," followed by Oliver asserting, "Practice makes perfect." Oliver and Marie talked about her quilts in duality, supporting what each other were saying all the way along. They both love Roddickton, they both had an appreciation for craft, and they could express these sentiments with equal enthusiasm. I asked how they felt about living in this community and Marie simply said, "It is good." Oliver nodded his head in agreement, but had a look on his face suggesting he had something more to say. Despite the fact that they wouldn't live anywhere else, Oliver offered a significant downside to living in the region. It is a downside shared with many other GNP communities:

> Pretty much as good as you can get to live anywhere, right? The only thing about it is for younger people there's no employment. When they get their education they have to leave. There's nothing here. For way older people now, we're pretty much situated and got what we need to survive on. … But, it is like what I just said. All the younger people they got no choice when they grow, right?

Life was not always as easy for the Reid family, as it is now that they are now in their retirement years. When I asked if times were ever tough for them, Oliver responded "Oh yah, very tough. For the first twelve years we was married I was working right on twelve months a year in the woods. And we used to the gardens [sic]. We had six children to feed." For a stretch of years, when the children were young, they faced financial hardship. Oliver would work at anything he possibly could, just to keep afloat, and even then they had to keep a garden to sustain the family. Oliver explained his work history to me in the following:

> I did everything. Mostly woods. Sixteen years old I start work for them. Forty-eight years. Yes, I'd stay out in the woods, and then the sawmill, and help three or four long-liners, and worked in the graves, construction, you name it.

Even though times were tough, and they had six children, Marie and Oliver remained happy together. Marie focused on raising their children, and Oliver kept busy with his plethora of jobs.




Left: Fig. 12 – A Portrait of Marie and Oliver Reid
Right: Fig. 13 – Marie Reid's Newfoundland Quilt

Marie has been making quilts for "years and years," twenty-two of which she has been making the Newfoundland Quilt. It is likely that Marie was among the first in her community to learn of and begin making this quilt type. Of their children, only one daughter has learned how to quilt, but unfortunately is not active in the practice, due to pressing health concerns. It should be noted, that while Marie has been quilting for a significant period of time, there were times in the past when she had too many other responsibilities to be making quilts. When she had young children, there was a period that she could not quilt, and around that same time, she also suffered from some health issues that prevented her from being creative. Nowadays with health, happiness, and freedom from responsibility, Marie is a very active and prolific quilter. When she finishes one

quilt, she immediately moves onto the next. "I'm not ready to rest until it is done. And then it is like, oh get another one in!" She mostly makes the painted style of quilt, and ensures that each image block is her own take on the oft-used patterns. She will frequently add backgrounds and other details to her fabric scenes, to a degree that is rarely seen on quilts. She also makes Graduation Quilts, Religious Quilts, and embroidered or appliqué quilts with repeating patterns, such as the googly-eyed Polar Bear quilt that they held up to show me, and I was especially fond of (see fig. 14).

After finishing her quilt blocks, and sewing them together, Marie begins to hand-quilt. In that time, all of her focus goes into the sewing—her mind is on nothing else. I asked Marie how long it takes for her to hand-quilt a Newfoundland Quilt. She said, "…It takes me two and a half days to hand-quilt. That's after the blocks are done." But for Oliver, that answer did not give full credit to how time-consuming the entire process was. He quickly added, "I'd say it is close to two weeks. From the time you begin, to the time you cut the material, do your tracing, and do your painting, sew it together, put the batting in it, put the layers on, and then you hand quilt. Almost two weeks." His attention to, and admiration for the amount of time that Marie put into her quilts, demonstrated his overall respect for his wife and her craft. At the time of my visit she was in the process of hand-quilting a Graduation Quilt for her grandson, and about to begin a queen-sized Newfoundland Quilt for a lady who lives in Ontario, but who is originally from Newfoundland. Marie made sure to emphasize the fact that her latest commission is for someone *from* Newfoundland. It seemed to me, that for Marie, it does not matter where in Canada you happen to live, if you are from Newfoundland, you should have a Newfoundland Quilt.


Left: Fig. 14 – Marie Reid's Polar Bear Quilt
Right: Fig. 15 – Lloyd Young's Model Airplane

Joyce Young

The Young house sits just barely a road-width from the rocky shores of Quirpon Bay. On the beach, just meters from the house, there is a wooden model airplane perched with its nose out to the water, with a propeller that moves in the wind (see fig. 15). Despite its small size, this community is home to many craftspeople. Joyce (see fig. 16) and Lloyd Young are just two of the many. While Lloyd makes wooden models of boats, motors and planes, his wife Joyce engages in a range of textile-based crafts skills, including quilting, knitting, embroidery, and cross-stitch. However, like Gwen, who lives on the other side of the community, Joyce's other crafts take a side-seat to her quilting practice. After diligently showing me a collection of striped knitted socks that she had made, Joyce began to show me her quilts (see fig. 17), along with all of the tools and materials related to this craft. Although she makes many different kinds of quilts, upon posing the question, "What's your favorite quilt to make?" I was told, "I likes the Newfoundland one, but it doesn't matter, I make a lot of scrap quilts too."


Right: Fig. 16 – Portrait of Joyce Young
Left: Fig. 17 – Joyce Young's Newfoundland Quilt

Despite her preference for making the Newfoundland Quilt type, she was clear about the fact that it is the quilt-making process she loves most, regardless of the kind of quilt she is making.

Joyce and her husband Lloyd have been living in Quirpon for their whole lives, and have been in the same house for a number of decades. The two got married 48 years ago, and shifted into their home soon thereafter. "Forty-six years I been in this house," she said. "This house was up around the harbour when we first began. A float come, and we towed it down. We bought this land, and we brought it down here. That was in '73, I think." They are now both post-retirement, approaching advanced life stages. I asked how they made a living in the community before they retired and she gave me a synopsis of their respective work histories:

> I worked at the fish plant for ten years, in St. Anthony. We was used to it, used to going St. Anthony anyhow. And then after that, then I was fishing. I gave up down there, and I was fishing with me husband for so many years, till the fishery closed. He's a fishermen, so when that closed, then I was out to PEI a couple

> summers working. I was working in a plant doing broccoli and cauliflower and stuff, packaging, processing, both of it. …I didn't mind that. I liked it.

Joyce and her husband had each carried what are considered quintessential, gendered roles during their work life years. Joyce, in the fish plant, and Lloyd, out fishing on the boats. Interestingly though, at some point, Joyce actually joined her husband on the boats, fishing for cod. She never fully explains the reason why she did this, but I assume that it was to maximize their productivity. She would be the only woman I met during my fieldwork who had ever worked on fishing vessels. Naturally, the demise of the fishery had a dramatic impact on their way of life. Although Joyce said she enjoyed her times of traveling to PEI to work in a vegetable factory, it must have also been a disruption for her. It made me wonder if these kinds of life disruptions contributed to how and why she took up craft making.

Joyce was very informative about the quilting process and what kind of skills and materials are required. Since she often makes appliqué style Newfoundland Quilts, I was sure to ask her how long it takes for her to make one. She told me that it takes about a week. She then corrected herself and said "…or a couple weeks, a couple weeks is longest. The longest is drawing it all out." The "drawing it all out" part is when a pattern is traced onto appliqué paper, which is then applied to fabric as a template. Even though it is a time-consuming process, it is one that she enjoys, as it directly reflects personal choices regarding fabrics, colors, and patterns. I pointed to the Newfoundland Quilt she had out on display, and asked what she planned to do with it. "Sell it. I sold a near few of them over to Ontario. Even over in the States. I have a son in Ontario, I used to do quilts for him, and send it. And he'd have Facebook and that and people used to see it. And there's the polar bear, and the flags, Newfoundland and Labrador." As she showed me

her quilts, she would point at each symbol she chose to appliqué, and say the pattern's name. She seemed happy with each and every one of her symbol choices, and I could see why she was such a prolific quilter—she loves the quilts themselves, as much as making them. These days however, Joyce has not been able to do much quilting, or any other craft types, for that matter:

> Right now I got a bad arm and I can't get nothing done. Ever since the 27th of July. They told me that I had tennis elbow, but when I was up to the doctor, I was back to the doctor again Wednesday, and he said he don't think it is from me elbow, he thinks it's from me neck. Now see I don't find me neck bad, but he says that doesn't matter. So they took some x-rays.

I asked if her injury might have been from working in the fish plant for all those years, and she agreed that it could be a possibility. She also thinks that all the knitting she has done has aggravated it. I got a sense that this injury has left her feeling frustrated, as she is forced to take a break from her most cherished pastime. I also asked about how Lloyd spends his time, now that he is not fishing. She explained that he kept himself busy. "Well," she said, "he's often outdoors doing stuff." I asked if any of that "stuff" had to do with the model airplane on the beach, or the wooden boats in the back yard.

"Oh yes," she exclaimed, "the one out on the bridge, and he got a big one of the Titanic out there [pointing to the garage]. He makes 'em. He's got two or three. He does the boats. He makes boats. Titanic is his main one." Soon after, Lloyd, who was a man of few words, but who has lots of warmth in his smile, gave Joyce permission to take me out to show me the Titanic. As much as I enjoyed Joyce's quilts, seeing his woodwork gave my visit to their abode a very satisfying end.

Inga Coombs

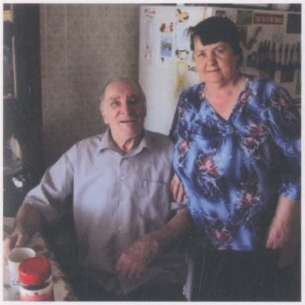
Main Brook is on the east coast of the peninsula, halfway between Roddickton in the

south, and St. Anthony in the north. Inga and Leslie Coombs (see fig. 18) have lived here their entire lives. When I asked Inga where she was from, she exclaimed, "I was born here. This is my home!" It was the most enthusiastic proclamation that she made during our time together. I could immediately perceive that Inga's personal sense of identity was closely tied to the community that she calls home. Inga Coombs is a retiree, at an advanced life stage, living with her long-time husband Leslie. She makes quilts and a few other textile based crafts, as a hobby. She first learned to sew when she was growing up, from her mother, by watching her make sealskin boots and utilitarian quilts. Her mother Minnie had several sisters, all of whom could work in various different textile mediums. Inga was exposed to these handicrafts throughout her whole upbringing, so it seems only natural to her that she became a quilter. The home she shares with her husband is on a large corner lot with many of her hand-painted crafts placed around the yard. Her son lives across the road in a house that was left to him by Inga's mother, who lived there until her death. Since he is away working in Alberta for much of the year, Inga uses the empty house as her quilting workshop. She explained to me the importance of having this workspace, and told a story about how her son wanted to make changes to the interior of the house. Pointing to the floor in the open living-room she stated:

> This is where I does them, down here. He was going to take up his carpet and put down hardwood floors. I said, not yet, till you come home to stay. This is where I do me quilts. It is better on the knees. … I tacks all of that down [to the floor] before I goes sewing.

It was in this second family home where I met with her, and where she spread out a painted Newfoundland Quilt, composed of thirty quilt blocks, for me to view (see fig. 19). In her son's absence, she has transformed the space into a functional quilting studio, with all of her supplies organized and readily available. She tends to do the painting in

the winter months, and sewing in the spring. It is a process that she considers time-consuming: "Now that takes a good while!" But is also one that she enjoys as a primary hobby. When she completes a quilt, she pins a tag to the corner with its name and dimensions. The queen-sized quilt she showed me was simply called The Newfoundland Quilt, with dimensions of 95 inches wide, and 113 inches long, written on the tag. Even though she is the only quilter that provided such measurements, it is possible that this is a standard size—one that many quilters use. Inga does not only make Newfoundland Quilts—she also makes different types of children's quilts as well as patchwork and/or pieced quilts. Her favorite to make though is the Newfoundland Quilt. She has made over thirty of these quilts, most of which are hand-painted, and all of which have picket edging, a design feature that is explained on page 69.



Left: Fig. 18 – Portrait of Inga and Leslie Coombs
Right: Fig. 19 – Inga Coombs' Newfoundland Quilt

Before his retirement around two decades ago, Inga's husband Leslie spent time working for Bowater lumber. According to residents I spoke to, lumber has been Main Brook's primary industry throughout the last century. It is an industry that continues to

operate in the region, but with less vitality than in the past when Leslie was working. Over a piece of partridgeberry pie, Leslie told me all about his life spent on the job, and noted how the town had faced a great deal of change in the past few years. He lamented the fact that Main Brook was getting smaller in size, and that young people had no way of making a living anymore. It is a sentiment that reminded me of how Oliver spoke about Roddickton, just forty-five minutes down the road, and how Gwen spoke of Quirpon, about an hour's drive north. It was a story that I could not escape during my fieldwork. Inga, like so many other quilters I met, addressed these upsetting changes by setting herself down to express herself through craft. Her painted quilts are wrought with nostalgic pride—dog teams, killicks, pot-bellied stoves, water wells, grinding stones, sealskin boots, and wooden wheelbarrows. Her vibrant symbols focus on how things used to be on the GNP and I got the sense from her that she would not have her quilts looking any other way.

The GNP Quilters

While looking at the lives and stories of these six quilters, I noticed many differences between them, but I noticed commonalities too. Each of these women is different in terms of age, work experience, family life, and in their overall perspective on what life is like on the GNP. Meanwhile, besides the fact that they have each chosen to practice a regional textile tradition, their seemingly disparate lives share part of the same story. One particularly universal part of this story revolves around great changes they have witnessed to the communities that they call home. Due to the implications behind these shared observations, they also share certain attitudes about what life will be like on the GNP for future generations. Another commonality is that despite the fact that they are at

different life stages, each woman has faced changes to the body that are associated with aging. Such changes have influenced certain aspects of their lifestyles, including their creative practices. In taking note of these commonalities, we can perhaps see what aspects of a person's observations, attitudes and experiences might have led them to start making Newfoundland Quilts.

When speaking to women about their quilts I realized that as much as they enjoyed talking about their life experiences with me, they also enjoyed talking about *how* they put together their quilts. Even when a quilter could not say exactly what the quilt and its symbols meant to them on a personal level, she was sure to tell me how much she loved the act of making it. This was also made clear in enthusiastic way that many of the quilters talked about the materials, patterns, fabrics, and steps involved in their craft practice.

II

The Material Dimension

Before a quilter can begin to make a quilt, she must ensure that all of the necessary materials and supplies are available. These materials include fabric, thread, needles, patterns, rulers, and in some cases, fabric paint and appliqué paper. Several of the quilters I interviewed showed me their collections of materials, as well as the space in their homes where they do most of their quilting work. While showing me these personal spaces and collections, the quilters would often demonstrate how certain tools are used, or how specific stitches are performed. Having the opportunity to observe vital steps in the quilting process helped me to understand how a Newfoundland Quilt is made. It also showed me just how important the material aspect of quilt making is to the quilt maker.

Why do quilters follow patterns? Where do these patterns come from? What fabrics and colors does she choose to use, and why? Through an assessment of different quilt types, quilting techniques, fabric selections, and pattern use, we can see not only how a Newfoundland Quilt is constructed, but also the ways a quilter can add individual flourishes to her work. One thing that I hope to illustrate within the following discussions is that in the process of making a Newfoundland Quilt, a series of negotiations take place, between a quilter and the larger quilting community, that help to proliferate a material tradition that is both individualized *and* subject to group agreement.

Quilt Types and Techniques

There are three distinct styles of the Newfoundland Quilt type, two of which are more common than the third. Of the two more common quilts, the crayon (or hand-painted) quilt is slightly more common, possibly because it takes less time to make. The appliqué

quilt, the second-most common type, while indeed time-consuming, is less-so than the third and most infrequent style—the hand-embroidered quilt. The three styles are made much the same way—figurative icons are embossed onto fabric blocks, and then the blocks are bordered and sewn together to make a quilt top. Each style, while ultimately meeting the same objectives as far as design and form go, is fundamentally different in how it is executed. For the painted style quilt, images are made by using fabric crayon or paint, to draw or trace from a pattern, onto square blocks of fabric (see fig. 20). The outline is then filled in using colors of the quilter's choice. This is considered the simplest style of Newfoundland Quilt to make. The appliqué quilt on the other hand, is made "…by carefully cutting designs from a piece of cloth and stitching them onto a plain background" (Bishop 1975,71). The Newfoundland Quilt version of appliqué requires that these fabric images be sewn onto single blocks of fabric (see fig. 22). The blocks are then sewn to borders, which is then all sewn together to form a quilt top (Bishop 1975, 71). The number of appliqué image blocks that a quilter will choose varies but is usually either sixteen or twenty – which is consistent with early forms of this quilt, such the Friendship or Baltimore Album quilt, from the American quilting tradition, which usually had twenty iconographic blocks (see Bishop 1975, 72 and Robinson 1983, 23). So, the Newfoundland Quilt is usually either four or five blocks across, and four or five blocks down, making them large enough to use on a double or queen sized bed.

Joyce Young is a quilter who primarily focuses on making appliqué quilts. She describes the process of making her fabric images in the following:

> I got the patterns and what I do is I go and buys this stuff that's see-through, for sticking them [the patterns] on, and I draws them all on the paper, and then I'll cut it all out, then I put it all on the material, and I cut it all out. Then I put it onto the block I got. It is all stuck on there, so I stitches it, with my sewing machine, I

> does it all on me sewing machine. It stays there, once it is sewed on, it can't come off. That's the longest it takes, is me doing that. I got patterns all drawn up on paper and I picks whatever I wants to put on.

While these steps are considered simple, they do involve knowledge and practice. The process, involves placing "sticky" appliqué paper onto colored fabric, tracing patterns onto the paper, and then cutting along the tracing so that the fabric is in shape. That shape can then be applied using an iron to the quilt block, and sewn around, using a sewing machine or the herring bone stitch, to keep it in place.

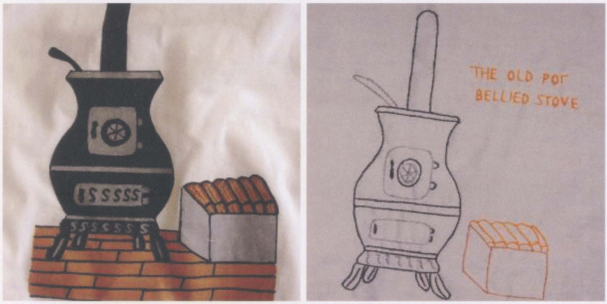


Fig. 20 – Painted Old Stove Block by Inga Coombs
Fig. 21 – Embroidered Old Stove by Millie Carnell

Fig. 22 – Work-In-Progress Appliqué Quilt Block by Gwen Patey

Although the symbols that quilters choose to appliqué vary, there appears to be a finite pool of possible images. The same is true for the embroidered and painted styles, which borrow from that same pool of images. For the embroidered quilt, the images are first traced from a pattern, and then embroidered with different colors of thread, using the chain stitch. With this style, the pictorial representation is generally not filled in, and so the image exists as an outline (see fig. 21). With these latter two styles, the quilter may include brief descriptions on their quilt blocks. An embroidered wood burning stove image for instance, may have the words "The Old Pot-Bellied Stove" stitched onto the block above or below the object being depicted. Like the images themselves, these words usually come from a pool of acceptable descriptions, used in a similar way by many other quilters. Sometimes, though rarely, the quilter may choose to write something original. In the few cases this originality with the words occurred, the images were quilt innovative

too. An example of this is seen in Pius Burke's one-of-a-kind drawing that pays tribute to the fishery (see fig. 28, pg. 96). This unique quilt block has the words "She's Gone Boys, She's Gone…", which no other quilt, made by any other quilter, has written on its surface. It should be noted that appliqué quilts rarely have words on them, which could be due to the creative restrictions that appliqué seems to pose in this way.

For the most part, when a quilter chooses a style, she will usually stick to that style and not bother with the other two Newfoundland Quilt styles, even if she has the skills to do so. Some of the more adept quilters will change between styles, but it is uncommon. Inga Coombs of Main Brook makes two different styles—the appliqué and the hand-painted—but even then, she expressed a preference for the hand-painted quilt in recent years, because they were simpler to approach and execute. Whether appliquéd, embroidered or hand-drawn, after the blocks have been sewn together, and the quilt top is considered complete, it is then tacked to both an inner lining and the quilt back (Bishop 1975, 9). If the quilt is to be hand-quilted, or "worked by finger" as many quilters say on the GNP, the quilt is placed on a frame. This frame, a wood or plastic structure standing on four legs, is meant to hold the three layers securely in place to prevent them from shifting during the quilting process[1] (1975, 8). Here the term "quilting," is a verb used to describe this particular act of stitching through the three layers, rather than the entire process beginning to end (Holstein 1973, 10). The quilter sits at the frame and stitches the layers together along the seams of the borders, as well as the borders of the images on the

[1] According to Gerald L. Pocius in his monograph *Textile Traditions of Eastern Newfoundland* (1979), traditional quilting frames in Newfoundland were wooden frames that held the quilt in place (1979, 30-1). One end of this frame was placed on the kitchen table, while the other was tied to the backs of kitchen chairs (source includes a photograph)(1979, 30-1).

quilt blocks. In blank or white spaces around the symbols, the quilter may choose to stitch designs for added aesthetic effect (Bishop 1975, 7). An example of this kind of decorative quilting could be stitching in wave-like shapes below an appliquéd dory image. This wave stitching would lend a "third dimension" to the quilt top—a traditional quilting technique that many of the more innovative quilters on the GNP will still employ.

Even though decorative stitching is still used on the quilts, hand quilting has been largely replaced by machine quilting. In fact, during my fieldwork I only saw a few quilting frames because most quilters nowadays choose to use sewing machines rather than sitting by a frame and working it by hand. The reason for this seems clear enough—the sewing machine dramatically cuts down the amount of time it takes to make a quilt. So too, in recent times, appliqué work has been altered for time efficiency. Originally, this style had hand embroidery on the fabric images to provide details. Now, some quilters prefer to use fabric paints to add details because of how much faster it is. Gwen Patey, who works mostly in appliqué, said she prefers the look of hand embroidery, but does not take the time to do it anymore. As a productive quilter who works on many quilts at once, it is not surprising that such delicate and time-consuming steps are skipped. This does not mean that the quilters in this study have not ever bothered with embroidery or hand quilting. In terms of hand quilting, most, if not all of the quilters I interviewed, learned their skills at a young age. I was shown several older pieced quilts that had been "worked with fingers." The quilters who showed me these hand-quilted samples were very proud of their work, and most of them admittedly would quilt by hand if they felt like it was worth their time. Interestingly, Marie Reid, a quilter who still does

her quilting by hand, chooses to render her symbols mostly with fabric paint, rather than embroidery or appliqué. In doing so, she perhaps frees up some time, and can justify spending that extra time at a quilting frame.

Quilt Design

According to Dorothy Osler in *Traditional British Quilts* (1987), "The *design* of a traditional quilt is the overall arrangement, or plan, of the individual *patterns* used" (1987, 23). This is important to note because I will be using these two words in the same fashion—patterns for the pictorial block images, and design for how they are arranged and bordered. Osler also points out that traditional quilters, such as the GNP quilters, do not tend use the word "design," and when they use "pattern," it is used "…in a rather loose way to mean either an individual pattern unit such as a rose or feather, or the overall arrangement of the patterns" (1987, 23). I found this to be true of the women I interviewed. They did not use the word "design," but did use the word "pattern" in a few different ways.

Even though quilters did not speak directly about the design of their quilts, it is clear that an overall accepted design is employed unwaveringly by almost all of the quilters I interviewed. While all the quilters discussed the pleasure they derived from selecting images, fabrics, and/or color schemes, few allowed their quilts to deviate from the dominant design. This dominant form consists of between sixteen and thirty quilt blocks, each with one image, and often bordered with Newfoundland tartan. This overall design appears to be taken from the Friendship or Baltimore Album quilts that come out of the America quilting tradition. Bishop writes, "A very popular type of appliqué quilt was the Album quilt. Many of the most impressive and beautiful Album quilts appear to have been created in or near Baltimore during the first half of the nineteenth century"

(1975, 71). It is a traditional design that uses an album concept by exhibiting several meaningful images. This model holds strong for the Newfoundland quilt, which in a sense is an album of Newfoundland iconography in its finished form. It seems then that an outside influence has played a role in how this new tradition is enacted.

As I will discuss later, there are several examples of innovations or spin-offs of the Newfoundland Quilt, but even these conform to the album design. There is only one quilter in this study who found a way to add personal innovations to her Newfoundland Quilt design, which she accomplishes without compromising how the quilt is expected to look. By choosing to double-border her quilt blocks, that is, to use two thin borders rather than a single, thick border, Joyce Young is able to add visual complexity to her quilts. But why is she the only quilter who includes such details to her design? I looked to David Pye's book *The Nature of Design* (1964) for answers. He addresses the concept of design, on a whole, and how it is impacted by the intended function of the object: "The thing which sharply distinguishes useful design from such arts as painting and sculpture is that the practitioner's design has limits set upon his freedom of choice. A painter can choose any imaginable shape. A designer cannot. If the designer is designing a bread knife it must have a cutting edge and a handle…" (Pye 1964, 7). Regardless of current decorative uses of quilts, they are primarily made for protecting the body from cold (Holstein 1973, 7). It is a function that the quilt cannot be extricated from, or it would no longer be a quilt. Modern takes on the quilt stay true to that functionality. Further to this, we have to think about what features make a Newfoundland Quilt, a Newfoundland Quilt. Joyce was able to find a way to innovate design without changing the identity of the object. Her added flourishes do not detract from the effectiveness of the album motif. Other quilters

may be unwilling to take this kind of chance, in fear of making a quilt that did not stay true to the tradition.

Pye also talks about style and how the requirements for a specific physical appearance impacts how design is played out:

> The requirement of appearance imposes very distinct limitations on the designer's freedom of choice of shape in the large. This is done through the medium of styles of design, which confine him to a fairly narrow canon of shapes. It can be argued that design has invariably exhibited styles because some clear limitations on freedom of choice are psychologically necessary to nearly all designers. When design gets too easy it becomes difficult. Styles provide these desired limitations when, as so often, the requirements of use and economy do not impose limitations which are close enough (1964, 37).

Here, Pye points out that not only are there physical limitations to design, but there are also limitations rooted in the psychology of the craftsperson. While this is a dimension of design that I will not delve too deeply in, it is worth acknowledging his theory that people who make things need to be faced with limitations in order to play out the ultimate design. This is relevant in how I got the sense from some quilters that they do not feel the need to make design changes because the quilts already reach aesthetic standards just the way they are.

The fact that the GNP quilting community conforms to a widely accepted design does not indicate a lack of creativity, but instead may point to the many ways a quilter can work around structural limitations to find innovation. It also demonstrates the degree to which quilters are committed to the tradition of this quilt type, including the tradition of how it is supposed to look. Even if a quilter wanted to deviate in some way, by putting more images onto a single block, or arranging the blocks in a scattered pattern, there would be a sense that it could no longer be called a Newfoundland Quilt, as physical features often dictate the categories that objects get placed into. Joyce Young's design

changes, while innovative, are not *too* different from what is expected of this quilt type. Jones has noticed a similar pattern among craftspeople that make utilitarian art. He asserts, "What tends to happen in utilitarian art is that the producer accepts a traditional framework and form so that he can direct his thoughts and creative energy to the surface decoration or refinement of that form" (Jones 1971, 94). Newfoundland Quilt makers accept a "traditional framework" and then decorate the surface in creative ways to express themselves as individuals. They add their own sense of style by choosing patterns, making changes to those patterns, and then adding desired colors and details.

It is interesting to note that a few quilters I met were open to small design changes based upon things they learned from other quilters. While most of the quilts have straight edges along all four outer sides, some have traditional "picket" or "saw-tooth" edging (see fig. 22b). Inga Coombs, who had been making straight-edged, quilts for many years, switched to picket edging once she learned about this design feature. She explained to me how she first heard about picket edges:

> *Lisa*: On the side here, I notice that you have a picket style. Did you come up with that idea on your own?
> *Inga:* No, a Pentecost minister's wife in Englee. We was over to the store and she was telling me about it and that's what I've been doing with my quilts ever since. It makes them almost like a bed skirt. There are blocks on either side of your bed, and then edging like a bed skirt—everything is altogether.

Inga recognized a benefit to changing her quilt design, and so quickly and permanently implemented it. Her willingness to do this demonstrates that quilter can be open to new design forms as they evolve over time. Despite this, as of now, there appears to be a commitment to what is thought to be the traditional design.

Fig. 22b – Painted Newfoundland Quilt with Picket Edging made by Inga Coombs

Pattern Use

In quilting, acquiring fabric is the first step and the next is working out the pattern for the design. In traditional pieced quilts, like for the Double Wedding Band quilt, this means using one overall pattern for the entire quilt, but for the figurative album-style quilt, this involves an overall pattern *and* a minimum of sixteen different image patterns. These patterns are to reflect the actual size of the iconography (Persinger in Robinson 1983,

118). Since the Newfoundland quilt has a simple design layout, the intricacy of pattern use comes into play when working with the individual quilt blocks. In light of how so many quilts, made by different quilters, contain recurring imagery, yet take on so many different forms, it is important to consider the role of pattern use in the quilt-making process.

Special attention is given to figurative quilts in Robinson's *The Artist and the Quilt* (1983). They are described in terms of diversity in the kinds of images that can be included on a quilt top:

> Besides nonfigurative designs for quilts, there is another kind of pictorial image—a literal icon. Here, for example, a "house" is delineated and filled with fabric laid in the contour. The result is a clear house pictograph, part of an endless lexicon of forms: stork, baby in a crib, man, woman, dog, cat horse, tree, flower, barn, schoolhouse, teacups, chair, bed, basket, scissors, spools, heart, hands start, fan. These pictographic forms that comprise the iconography of quilts are arranged in a variety of ways. In many autobiographical quilts, there is a coming together of text, purpose, and presence that gives the work a special sense of wholeness (Schapiro in Robinson 1983, 29).

The above explains how an "endless lexicon of forms" can contribute to the "purpose and presence" of a quilt. We have already determined that the Newfoundland Quilt is restricted in how the pictographs are arranged, but are there any restrictions to what patterns are used and how the pictographs appear? What I hope to demonstrate is that while there is no definitive *way* to use patterns, most quilters are inconsistent in how they acquire, use, and alter patterns. They also tend to restrict the "endless lexicon" so to keep the quilt true to its meaning and purpose. Such existing patterns are a necessary component of the quilt. Michael Bird in his work *Canadian Folk Art: Old Ways in a New Land* (1983) addresses this necessity by asking us to remember that within textile arts existing patterns have always been depended up (1983, 51). He states, "In an age of

mass-production and paint-by-number crafts, we tend to idealize the past as a time of unbounded individual creativity. In fairness we ought to remember that textile arts such as weaving and embroidery have always depended on existing patterns and available materials, however imaginatively they may have been used" (Bird 1983, 51). The Newfoundland Quilt is no exception to this. While it depends on the use of accepted patterns by the quilters, there can be great imagination in how they are engendered.

Some of the same patterns used for the painted quilt are used for the appliquéd and embroidered quilts as well. This interesting transference of imagery to different mediums is something that all of the quilters seemed capable of, and had developed their own techniques for doing so. Inga Coombs, for instance, used an overhead projector to trace her patterns onto fabric, in preparation for painting the images. When she does appliqué quilts, she makes cardboard cut-outs, which she then uses as a template to make fabric shapes. These are then hand-stitched onto her quilt blocks. Her approaches to the two different styles mark two distinctive methods of pattern use. Particularly in reference to her painted quilts, Inga made it quite clear that she would sometimes change existing patterns to suit her own stylistic preferences. She would then use that same altered pattern over and over again, so that each of her quilts contained the same images. One area that did change from quilt to quilt was her paint or fabric color choices. Then there are decisions about which symbol to put where, on a quilt top. This kind of decision-making is mostly rooted in what arrangement looks best. Gwen Patey, for instance, lays them all out and shuffles them around: "I lay it out on the bed somewhere, and if I don't like it on that spot, switch it."

I also asked several quilters how they acquired their patterns. Many stated that they receive patterns as they are passed around from quilter to quilter. My attempts to follow patterns from quilter to quilter rapidly became a naïve pursuit as the quilters to whom I asked, "Where did you get this pattern from?" almost always had the same answer. Marie Reid responded by saying, "Some of them I made them up, and my friends gave me some." People tended to not know very much about the original sources, but a few quilters recognized that a children's coloring book about Newfoundland was the original pattern source for many of the more familiar patterns. The moose icon, which shows up on most quilts in a similar way, is clearly from a coloring book (see fig. 23). While I was unable to find this specific moose image in a coloring book, I did find two coloring books in Memorial University's Center for Newfoundland Studies that were likely borrowing places for other patterns. The *Newfoundland and Labrador Coloring and Activity Book* (1986) contains a few images, such as the pitcher plant and the Newfoundland dog, that bare resemblance to quilt blocks on the GNP. The same is true for the *Newfoundland and Labrador Coloring Book* (1990), which contains at least one familiar image. This leads me to believe that there are three or more different coloring books that have contributed to the patterns that are in circulation.

Other quilters added the role of books, in general, stating that they frequently find images in a book, and then adapt them as patterns. Naomi spoke of using books to find patterns, but also mentioned that friends might help her to acquire patterns from the Internet. Upon asking where she got her collection of patterns from she said, "Oh, there're from places, like a book or on something that I saw or I'll just get something small, and draw it bigger. Or someone could take if off from their computer for me, if I

wanted it." There is no one way that she acquired patterns. Joyce is much the same, using books, and then making the image larger or smaller to make it just the right size for the quilt block. Pointing at a rocking chair symbol Joyce said, "Um, I think it was in a book I had or something. It wasn't as big as that. I'm not a good person for drawing, but I manages." I asked her if it was a pattern that she would use again, and she explained that she keeps every pattern, even ones that do not work out that well, together in a box (see fig. 24). "I keeps all this here," she said. It appears true enough that the patterns come from many different places and are then widely disseminated. For this reason tracing specific images to their original source seems like an impossible task.

I was not hindered however, in asking about how a quilter might alter patterns or even innovate patterns. Gwen Patey is one of the more serious quilters I met. As a retiree who spends "every waking moment at it," she is always updating her patterns and innovating new takes on familiar iconography. Although her images are closely aligned with the familiar canon, she draws most of her patterns freehand, rather that tracing from other images. She explains her process in the following: "Every one is a little different. I pretty much do everything free hand. All this here, I just sit down and draw it on, and that's all. I don't take it from something, you know what I mean?" The Purity hard bread bag pattern, for example, is a pattern that frequently shows up on quilts, but since hard bread bags are in most homes on the GNP, there is little need for a pattern to float around from quilter to quilter. Gwen simply took an old hard bread bag, cut off the front facing panel, and uses it as a stencil for her pattern. In this case, her appliqué imagery comes right from the source. She is glad to have kept her original stencil, as in recent years, the hard bread bag has changed its image, and she no longer likes the look of. When I had

first asked her about where she got her hard bread bag pattern she explained that it was "just a regular hard bread bag." She then went on to say how she altered the image a little bit to give it a three-dimensional shape. "Did you notice on some people's quilts, it is just a red rectangle, it is got no shape to it. So I kinda shape it up a little." She also explained that sometimes she receives a pattern and immediately feels the need to improve it: "Some of the ones that I had was really ugly when I got them, and I kinda fixed them. Because I think they were traced over so many times that there was no shape left to them anymore." In the way that Gwen talks about patterns she demonstrates her aesthetic sensibilities, inadvertently critiquing patterns that other quilters use. Through innovating her own patterns, Gwen is able to uphold a personal aesthetic standard. This is not something that all quilters do yet they all still find personal ways to innovate.

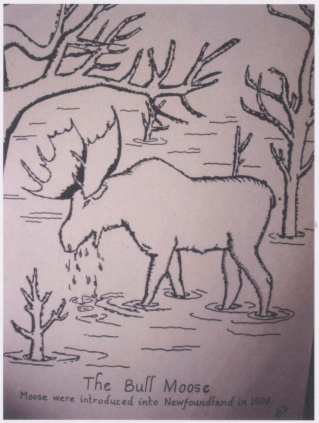


Fig. 23 – Bull Moose Pattern from a Children's Coloring Book

Fig. 24 – Joyce and her Box of Patterns

Although there is a large array of icons for a quilter to choose from, which quilters continuously reuse, alterations to patterns are not only accepted, but also encouraged. Personal takes on accepted patterns help a quilter to maintain a sense of individuality. It is important that they are making something a little bit different from everyone else. Gwen is rare in how she draws most of her patterns on her own. Many quilters rely on other quilters to acquire patterns, and then do a mix of drawing and tracing from these patterns. In this way, a single quilt can represent the different ways that a quilter might choose to use a pattern. Myrtle's daughter Debbie explained her

approach when I asked if she did all of the quilt's drawings on her own: "Not only, I mix and match patterns *and* drawing." Marie Reid expressed that she sometimes creates her own patterns and sometimes uses patterns given to her. But despite her preference for using patterns, Marie will also draw an image freehand, if she feels inspired. On a single quilt, Marie could point to which images came from patterns, which patterns she altered, and which images were freehand. In showing me these various depictions, Marie appeared to have deeper pride in patterns that she came up with on her own, or pictures she drew freehand.

Naomi's appliqué quilt is much the same. It has that array of familiar icons, some of which were derived from the coloring book, while other patterns appear to be one-offs. By *one-off* I mean a pattern drawn up by hand for single-use. I saw several examples of such one-time pattern uses, but the most memorable is Naomi's Newfoundland Dog icon. This quilt block features an appliquéd animal that barely looks like a dog, let alone a Newfoundland Dog. I had to ask her what kind of animal it was and she told me behind her laughter that she drew it and that it was a dog. Naomi had a sense of humor regarding some of her less-successful rendering attempts. Since this pattern did not appear on her other quilts, it is the product of a one-time pattern use. So on this one quilt, there are accurately rendered replications of the accepted patterns, alongside her own drawing, used just one time, for just that one quilt. A pattern will be discarded or altered if the quilter thinks it looks strange in its completed form. According to Gwen, it is very rare that a new pattern will look the way you want it on the very first attempt.

Gwen has a philosophy of sharing when it comes to her collection of patterns and even her design innovations. She stressed that pattern sharing is fine, because no matter what, each quilter will render a pattern differently.

> *Gwen*: Now I find a lot of people have the same patterns, but they never come out like mine. I give my patterns to whoever want them. Like, come on, that don't bother me none.
> *Lisa:* A lot of people like to share their patterns.
> *Gwen*: There's some people that won't though. Did Sharon show you her wedding quilt? See that's my patterns. She just called me up and I said "Sure!"

Gwen took pride in her willingness to share patterns and showed frustration that some quilters are territorial over their collections. Given how widely disseminated certain patterns are—having seen exact replicas in many different collections—I believe that pattern sharing is predominant while pattern privacy is rare.

The quilters who were actively making a Newfoundland Quilt were all willing to show me their collection of patterns. Often stored in large piles, in Tupperware bins, or in cardboard boxes, these collections are miniature archives that tend to follow a quilter's pattern-use progression, particularly if she has been making the Newfoundland Quilt for a considerable amount of time (see fig. 25). When older worn out patterns are replaced with fresh tracings, the image is inevitably altered, for better or worse, in the process. A few times, I was shown icon patterns that had been used so frequently, that they no longer maintained a recognizable shape, but they were still kept in the collection. Although I did not do an intensive survey of any one collection, I believe that even just a perusal of the patterns can illustrate the ways in which the quilters play out their pattern choices based on regional influences, personal tastes, and individual expressiveness. The interplay of these factors comes through on every quilt, stemming in part from the existing patterns available to the quilters.

Fig. 25 – Inga Coombs' Pattern Collection

Selecting Fabrics

The way in which fabric choices are employed is similar to pattern use, but appears to be more limited. The same conventional influences are at work, but the choices of fabrics used to frame the blocks seems to be limited to either the Newfoundland tartan or a suitable solid colors—usually a color *from* the Newfoundland tartan. When I asked Myrtle about how she selected the fabric to border the symbols, she said, "Different colors like, I usually go with green and burgundy for the Newfoundland Quilt, because it is the a lot of the colors that's in the Newfoundland tartan." Myrtle doesn't like to use the tartan itself, because she finds it difficult to work with, and inappropriate for a quilt. She describes it as "…almost too thin for a quilt, it is right silky." Gwen chooses either plain fabric *or* the tartan, depending on what she has available. She did not express any difficulties working with the tartan, and even expressed that it increases the value of the

quilt. She told me how the prices she sets for the quilts are impacted by which fabrics she uses for the border: "If I make a quilt, and I strip it with plain fabric, I sell it for $200.00 and if I use Newfoundland tartan, I sell it for $250.00."

The Newfoundland tartan has a plaid motif of green, intersected with thin lines of gold, white, brown and red. It is a tartan emblematic of Newfoundland culture. One quilter believed that each color is meant to represent a different aspect of the island's ecology—gold for the sun, green for the pine trees, white for the snow, brown for the rocks and cliffs (see fig. 26). According to Iain Zaczek, in *World Tartans* (2001), the Newfoundland tartan was designed in 1972 by an individual named Louis Anderson. Zaczek believes that the tartan's colors were chosen to reflect Newfoundland's fishing and forestry industries, but was also inspired by the province's anthem—the "Ode to Newfoundland" (2001, 377). Quilters frequently use this fabric to border each of the symbols on the quilt. It is thought to enhance the regionalist orientation of the quilt, and some quilters even believe that it is an imperative component of the quilt. Not everyone uses the tartan though, which could be due to community influences, but is more likely from personal decision-making, or issues such as fabric availability. Joyce mentions difficulties around acquiring different fabrics in the following:

> *Joyce*: Yeah, I got the sealer too, but I don't think I got neither one of them now. It's a job to get. Around here there's only one store that you can buy material, and they don't have the colors that you want. It is a job.

For Joyce, fabric availability actually dictates what images she can and cannot put on a quilt. Other quilters spoke of the inconvenience of having to travel to Corner Brook or St. Anthony to find the material they want for a quilt. Rita's quilt is framed with pink fabric, giving it a distinguishing quality. She may have chosen this fabric because it was all that

she had access to, or because it simply aligned with her personal sense of taste. Regardless, I believe that some quilters would see her quilt and secretly prefer that she had used the Newfoundland tartan, while other quilters would not have noticed either way. Overarching attitudes such as these may stem from a specific communities expectations, or from personal ideas of how to profess regional pride. Either way, despite freedoms for which symbols can be embossed, and which fabrics can be added as frames, there are still strictures in place in form and design that help keep the quilt consistent, even as the traditional styles will likely see alteration over the years.

Fig. 26 – Inga Coombs' Newfoundland Tartan

Quilt Use and Meaning

Considering the change in the function of handmade quilts in rural Newfoundland, it's clear that a quilt's fundamental meaning has shifted too. I've noted a consistent attitude about how this once-utilitarian object is supposed to be used after it has been made. In short, it is not to be used at all. The handmade quilt has strayed from its historical sense

of purpose. When the functionality of an object is removed, it becomes an object to covet for other reasons. Such reasons could include nostalgia, decoration, or sentimental attachment. The Newfoundland Quilt is made over several weeks, with great attention and care, and then deemed "too nice to use on a bed." It is no surprise then that quilters had many pristine quilts to show me. Some were in protective plastic kept in the closet, others were displayed on beds in spare bedrooms. When a utilitarian object becomes a decorative object, it goes through a transformation of value and meaning to the person who possesses it. In her piece "The Lives of Objects" (2002), Sandra Flood addresses how shifts in function can impact a quilt's overall meaning:

> As the quilt moved from its traditional functional role as a bedcovering in a domestic setting to covering a bed in a museum exhibit to hanging on a gallery wall, its role and its messages changed. Some messages became obscure, such as the named but otherwise anonymous quilt-makers, while new messages emerged, such as its links with an imagined past… (2002, 102-03).

The object, in this case the quilt, has a new set of identities to contend with, and so too it carries new meanings. I never once heard mention of a Newfoundland Quilt being valuable for its warmth—handmade quilts are now most valuable in terms of their aesthetics and symbolic meanings. Sherrie Davidson, who studied family quilt collections in Prince Edward Island, reflects on how utilitarian quilts were different in both meaning and construction, than decorative ones:

> Quilts made for utility and warmth were sewn less for admiration than for hard daily use. When home fires grew cold in the night and a child awakened to find his cast-off trousers frozen, accordion-like, to the floor, the degree of warmth offered by the quilt determined its merit. Some bed covers were put together hurriedly... For some, the sight of an old quilt brought back memories of lean, hard years (Davidson 2010, xv).

In Newfoundland as well, quilts for warmth would have been made with a different set of technical and aesthetic standards. These quilts, made for use, are now objects of

nostalgia. In the present day, Newfoundland Quilts are made with a different set of material considerations in place. For women who make the Newfoundland Quilt, they want their quilts to be beautiful, and not subjected to wear and tear. As Gwen mentioned, in reference to the Newfoundland and Wedding Quilts, "Most of those quilts probably do not ever get washed, because they probably never get used. No matter what you use, after a washing, it is never the same." This was a common perspective. When I asked Oliver and Marie if they considered decorative quilts works of art, they both said, "Yes!" Oliver then pointed at his wife's latest Newfoundland Quilt and said, "That might never be worn on a bed, right?" In this, he suggests that by not using the quilts, they are elevated to a special status, much beyond a bedcover. They are symbolic quilts, meant to live on for subsequent generations, to represent the range of values that flourish in the present day. Newfoundland Quilts may be so special to the people who make them because they have links to the past, imagined or real, that pay tribute to this past in creative ways that are not only of cultural value, but of cultural relevance too. Long-term residents of a specific area make them, to express a range of memories in the face of rapid cultural change. Though not yet considered cultural works of art, to be exhibited on museum walls, it is probably just a matter of time before they are bestowed this honor. In the meantime, regardless of how the Newfoundland Quilt is treated and viewed from the outside, the simple act of making one appears to be having a positive impact on the quilters who make them in terms of helping them shape a personal sense of identity in their own right.

III

Identity Creation and Quilting Traditions

Every time I was shown a Newfoundland Quilt I wondered why these women felt compelled to make this kind of object. What is merely a way to pass time or was there a deeper purpose for those who make such handicrafts? I soon realized that quilt making means different things to different people, but for everyone, whether aware of it or not, a sense of identity is being created and asserted. But we cannot talk about identity in the lives of quilters, without recognizing the inexorable connection that identity has to tradition. Sims and Stephens, in their text *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (2005), emphasize this connection:

> We claim our identities, in part, through our traditions, and so the more invested we are in defining ourselves as a member of a particular group, the more invested we may become in maintaining the traditions of that group. Sometimes we simply get caught up in nostalgia for things past, and that shapes our attitudes and expectations about tradition. Our individual lives are short, so it may be comforting to feel that sense of connection with the past. We often look backward to see who we are, or to see how secure our identities are, as a way of seeking assurance that our lives could continue to have relevance into the future (2005, 74).

What Sims and Stephens are saying is that people use tradition in their everyday lives to help create a sense of identity, whether that identity is personal or shared, and whether it is used to access the past or generate "relevance" for the future. Considering the reality that there is an aging population on the GNP, and one that has undergone rapid socio-economic change, it does not surprise that people may seek a "connection with the past" to help provide a sense of who they are. They select traditions to practice by reaching into their cultural past in order to find something that they can align with a present conception

of themselves (from Ben-Amos 1984 114-115 and Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983) (Sims and Stephens 2005, 66). That present conception, reaffirmed by the tradition itself, contributes to their overall senses of personal and regional identity. Furthermore, by participating a group's established traditions, members are aided in feeling as if they truly belong to that group (Sims and Stephens 2005, 66).

There are different layers of identity creation and affirmation that can occur in the process of making a Newfoundland Quilt. Elliot Oring in his piece "The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity" (1994) delineated two sub-categories of identity, both of which are worthy of attention, as they are equally pertinent in how they apply to these quilts. Oring's most valuable categorizations are *personal identity* and *collective identity*, with personal identity forming the upper sphere, with certain aspects flowing down into a lower pool that forms a sense of collective identity (1994, 202). Oring defines personal identity as a composition of personal "…memories, identifications, and repudiations of individuals, ideas, and experiences which come to constitute a perhaps shifting, but nevertheless discernible, configuration" (1994, 212). Collective identity however, "…refers to those aspects of personal identity that are derived from experiences and expressions common to a group" (1994, 212). This "intersection of personal identities" (1994, 212), can help put forward a shared cultural experience that is enacted in multiple different forms, including participation in some traditional activities.

It is also important to consider the fact that this quilt type is recognizable as an oicotype, which Oring describes as a tradition "imprinted" with qualities that potentially align the object with a "national, provincial, [or] parochial" order (von Sydow 1948:16, 243) (1994, 220). Oring states that it is the presence of an oicotype that initially requires

the folklorist to bring up questions around identity (1994, 220). This is certainly the case when reflecting on how I began interpreting the quilt. Aside from registering it is aesthetic and material qualities, I began to see the regional importance of these quilts. It can be said that the very nature of the Newfoundland Quilt is "provincial" in order, and is therefore an oicotype of the province, infused with questions and assertions regarding identity. Having said that, Newfoundland Quilts are complex in terms of identity, as there are many layers of meaning being made, each layer working together to contribute to different levels of identity. For example, on one hand, there are the individual quilters whose personal engagement with a regional tradition helps them to assert a personal sense of identity. Then, on the other hand, there is also a collective sense of identity that these quilting practices feed into, reinforced partially through the ubiquitous nature of the quilt. In addition, there are the quilts themselves and the symbols they carry which put forward their own notions of personal and shared senses of identity. These three layers, among others, all speak to each other, and help to generate and affirm both individual and shared senses of identity.

Before launching into an exploration of how identity is perceived and enacted by GNP quilters, it is important to note that those who make craft do not actually use the word "identity," and do not necessarily have a conscious grasp of what identities they are creating and outwardly projecting through their quilts. As stated by Pocius in his article "Art" (1995), " …abstract concepts such as 'text' or 'identity' rarely enter common discourse" (1995, 413). This means that it is difficult to ask questions about identity to quilters outright. When I naively attempted to do so, I received murky or simplistic answers. For this reason, while there are recognizable layers of identity being created and

affirmed through quilting, they are not always easy to access or interpret. In order to approach an understanding of how different levels of identity are operating on the GNP, I have looked at such factors as what it means to be a part of a discernable group, what role creativity might have in personal identity making, how traditions are connected to this process, and how this quilt type may have become involved.

Notion of the Folk Group

I have already noted how the concept of "group" is relevant in developing identity, but what is a *folk group*, and how is it identified? It is important to broach this in order to see how the quilters on the GNP might be a kind of folk group, and how the formulation of this group might impact the way traditions are performed. In his book *Folk Nation* (2002), Bronner quotes Alan Dundes at length, giving a voice to his ideas about how a folk group can be identified:

> The term "folk" can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own (Dundes in Bronner 2002, 33).

Dundes then explains that whether or not individual members all practice traditions, members of the group will likely be aware of the many traditions that help to give the group an individual sense of identity (Dundes in Bronner 2002, 33). Jan Brunvand in his text *The Study of American Folklore* (1998) distinguishes six categories of folk groups including groups around age, family, gender, region and ethnicity or nationality (1998, 51). He then adds underlying links such as religion, hobbies, educational background, and even physical factors such as blindness (1998, 51). Brunvand suggests, "...acceptance of traditions by these groups usually implies some degree of conformity with group tastes

and values (1998, 50). Folk groups can therefore be identified first by a common linking factor, such as region, and then by the customs, language, and/or traditions shared by that group. The quilters that I have included in this study constitute a folk group on a few different levels. For one, they share a geographic region. Communities in this region have many shared cultural features such as dialect, occupation, foodways, and traditional practices. Not only are GNP community members, whether craftspeople or not, part of one kind of folk group, but those that make craft, or more specifically quilts, are part of a smaller folk group within, sharing specific traditional practices as a "linking factor." In fact, although never stated out loud, there is a sense that you have to be *from* Newfoundland to make a Newfoundland quilt. You can be living away, but you have to be from here, or living here as a long-term resident, to be able to make such a regionally specific quilt type. When a talented quilter from Alberta began quilting lighthouse images, it was considered "very strange" by the Newfoundland quilter who told me about it. It is true that there are no lighthouses in Alberta. Shouldn't the quilt reflect the region you are from? Her attitudes around this demonstrate the vital connection between her regional folk group and the quilts that she makes. The six quilters I have profiled were all born and raised on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. Some have traveled and lived away, others have stayed living near their home community for their entire lives. Despite different levels of folk group membership, all residents of the GNP are likely aware of quilting traditions, if not the Newfoundland Quilt as a tradition in and of itself. But a question remains—how does the quilting folk group influence concepts of quilt appearance and expressions of identity?

In answering such a query, it is important to note that individuals who gain identity by way of traditional expressions belong to not just two, but perhaps many sub-groups (Bronner 2002, 33). While the GNP quilters belong to what I call a "quilting folk group," they also have other associations that make them members of other folk groups. Bronner stresses this fact in the following "… if folk can refer to any group, then the types of identities possible are virtually unlimited, even though Bauman and Abrahams readily admit that some groups because of social structure or cultural considerations will produce more folklore than others" (2002, 33). Brunvand makes this point too, stating that "…folk groups need not be composed only of rural people living in remote locations and that a person may belong to several folk groups at the same time" (1998, 51). All of this is important to note because of how the possible ways the quilting folk group determines the boundaries of what a Newfoundland Quilt should look like, how it should be made, and who should be making them, regardless of wide variance within these strictures. Thinking back to what Brunvand states about how folk group membership often involves conformity to particular tastes and values, it becomes obvious that the quilting folk group makes an agreement on these kinds of factors. Keeping this in mind, it seems that an individual quilter will be under myriad influences contributing to how a quilt will turn out visually, and what overall sense of identity it is expressing. This dynamic set of factors makes it difficult to say which of the quilter's decisions in the quilt-making process come from the influence of the quilting folk group, individual expression, or other groups that the person is associated with. While it is certain that the quilting folk group *does* impact certain aesthetic standards, and has even established a canon of useable symbols, it can never be said for sure where lines between group and

individual influences can be drawn, or when influences from outside of the quilting group are present.

Creativity and Identity

I also became curious about how a quilter's personal creativity was connected to the sense of identity that they were putting forward. There appeared to be a stronger sense of pride from a quilter when she produced a Newfoundland, Wedding, or Graduation Quilt for me to view, rather than pieced designs from the American tradition. The originality of the regional designs, an ability to choose which symbols to depict, and how they would be rendered, gives the quilt-maker a sense of power in the process. Yvonne Milspaw in her work on regional quilt designs noted something similar: "Quilters too assign value, and see a value-laden difference between the quilts they copy from printed sources and ones that are probably traditional, community-based, folk creations" (Milspaw 1997, 364). But despite this sense of pride over regional or individual originality, the quilters have a difficult time considering themselves artists and in some cases, even the word "quilter" made some women feel uncomfortable. Myrtle Lewis put forward a multifaceted identity by referring to herself as a "jack-of-all-trades." Upon asking her, "So you're a quilter?" She said, "Yes," but then quickly stated that in actuality, she's more of a jack-of-all-trades. She includes her former career under this umbrella terminology, but is essentially cautious about the word "quilter." She is careful to mention that she makes quilts as more of a pastime than something she takes seriously. It is a determination that almost eclipses her from being considered a quilter. In Myrtle's case, I think she is fearful of calling herself a quilter because it might somehow diminish other roles she has in her life, that hold great importance. The terminology "quilter" may

have felt heavy-handed; she does many things, *including* quilt making. But, as I learned, the treatment of the creative sense of self is really case-by-case. For many people self-identifying as a quilter *is* important. It is a traditional practice in the region, and therefore an acceptable, if not preferable, identity to uphold. To be a quilter is a badge of honor as it helps to provide a sense of belonging to a quilting folk group.

Being *creative* or *crafty* however, seems to be downplayed as an identifying personal quality, despite the fact that making a quilt is an inherently creative process. For example, when I asked Joyce Young, about her creative sense of self, she had very little to say.

> *Lisa*: You said that it is a way to pass time, but is it also a creative thing for you/?
> *Joyce*: Yes, sometimes.

This vague answer was never clarified for me and she certainly never referred to herself as a creative person. Her husband Lloyd on the other hand, said to me, "We're old crafty people," in reference to himself *and* to his wife. The fact that he can self-identify as "crafty" tells me something of how he looks at himself. He closely aligns himself with this part of his identity. It is possible that his wife does as well, even though she was incapable of verbally expressing it. Naomi, on the other hand, is an example of a quilter who could clearly express her creative sense of self, but only from within the context of her *husband's* craftsmanship.

> *Lisa:* Does he do any creative stuff?
> *Naomi:* Oh yes, we built this place.
> *Lisa*: Really? That takes some skill.
> *Naomi*: Oh yes, he can build anything. He built boats, and he built this place.
> *Lisa:* He built boats too?
> *Naomi:* Yes, he built ten boats. Oh yes, both of us is creative. You save a lot of money too, when both of you is creative. You make a lot of your own stuff, including clothes.

Even though Naomi can recognize that she is creative person, she counters this admission by talking about the financial benefit of making your own things. For Naomi, it seems it is not enough to be an active, skillful, craftsperson, there has to be an additional motive involved. I suspect that she is not alone in this. It was very difficult for any of the quilters I interviewed to portray themselves as talented, imaginative, and artistically capable, even if they know deep-down that these are accurate descriptions of their quilting work. What is difficult for me to determine is not whether or not creativity plays a role in personal identity, but *how much* and *what aspects* of their creative practices feed into the personal identities they have generated over time.

While some could concede to being creative or crafty, *artistic* is not a word that anyone I met applied to their quilting practice. By recognizing that they are engaging in a hobby using skills largely learned in youth, quilters can seemingly obscure the artistic merits of the objects they make. Instead of recognizing their unique skill sets, talents and artistic visions, they see themselves as simply continuing a traditional practice. Indeed, the quilters I spoke to were much more outspoken about their self-identity as tradition-bearers, than that of craftsperson or artist. Marie Reid, who learned to make textiles from her mother, proudly stated, "…I been sewing since I were sixteen years old." She also practices hand quilting, an increasingly rare traditional technique, which she speaks of with a similar pride. Marie has no problem calling herself a quilter, and likes the fact that she practices a traditional skill, yet has reservations about seeing herself as creative. Even though she draws many of her own patterns, she was apprehensive to say she had any special artistic skill. The fact that the quilts are not used as quilts – instead displayed on spare beds, or kept in storage—does not seem to impact their overall intended identities

as utilitarian objects. The fact that these are somehow still considered utilitarian objects helps a quilter to separate herself from an artistic identity. This kind of selectivity in terms of creative self-identity, leads me to believe that within the quilting folk group, there are certain identities that should be expressed, and others that should remain shielded.

What seems to be less convoluted is how other aspects of identity can come through the quilt. Regardless of how a quilter sees or portrays her creative identity, the quilt is a medium through which to express other aspects of identity. For example, the making of the Newfoundland Quilt, and its region specific symbols, suggests a strata of regional identities that operate simultaneously: I am from Newfoundland, I am from the Northern Peninsula, I am from Roddickton. Then there are quilters who use the same album motif to make Religious Quilts. The blocks on these quilts may contain an image of the local church, or symbols such as a bible or hands praying. These blocks speak for the religious orientation of the quilter and become a way to express a religious sense of identity. Likewise, it is clear that a Newfoundland Quilt, because of its range of symbols, can express multiple identities, *including* a religious one. When we see the oil lamp icon for instance, we usually see a bible sitting under the lamplight (see fig. 27). Not only is this symbol important to the region in terms of what life was once like on the GNP, but it also hints at an overall religious identity that has likely held strong into present day. In his study of Anna Bock, Simon J. Bronner found that her folk art expressions revealed "…the interplay between personal identity and the religious and ethnic values of her community—a dialectic between Self and Other" (1981, 81). For each quilter then, identity is a highly personal expression, however shared certain parts of it might be. The

lamp symbol therefore is dynamic in the meaning it is expressing, and is only one of multiple symbols that may have comparably dynamic meanings on a single quilt.[2]

Fig. 27 – Old Lamp with Bible Quilt Block by Marie Reid

In terms of the spin-off quilts, like the Wedding Quilt, or the Graduation Quilt, the creation and affirmation of identity is played out differently. In most cases, these two quilt types are made as gifts for friends or family. In the process of making such gifts, the quilter may be assisting in the reaffirmation of *someone else's* sense of identity rather than her own. While still asserting decision-making powers, the quilter carefully selects symbols to emboss on the quilt's surface that are tailored for another person. For a Wedding Quilt, which is a symbolic marker of a rite of passage, icons are selected for the quilt, not by the couple, but instead the quilter. Here she carefully makes design decisions

[2] It should be noted that one should not make assumptions based upon the symbols that they see on a quilt. A quilter may include images that do not necessarily reflect specific beliefs or affiliations, but may like the aesthetic quality of the image or may feel like she has to include it for the quilt to be complete.

based upon what she thinks would be appropriate for the person receiving the symbolic gift. In some ways, her role is that of an identity-maker, regardless of whether or not her choices accurately reflect the couple, their wedding, and their future together.

New Traditions

So, where exactly did the Newfoundland Quilt come from? Although I cannot say exactly how this quilt type came to be, some plausible reasons that it became a regional tradition can be explored. According to oral accounts, the Newfoundland Quilt tradition began around the time of, or just after the collapse of the cod fishery. This is of interest to me because it implies that this drastic cultural upheaval may be connected to the rise of this tradition. Of the many cultural side effects of the moratorium, at least two of them could have directly impacted the proliferation of this particular quilting practice. The first is that the sense of local cultural identity was disrupted by the moratorium, and was therefore in need of reinforcement or reinvention. This meant that people might have sought ways to express certain cultural attributes that were suddenly under threat. Secondly, given the drastic and sudden changes to the social and economic situation, which became more and more apparent over time, there was cause for the capturing of memories or the expression of nostalgic sentiment. In this way, the quilt would offer a way to confront the changes, meanwhile paying tribute to a familiar, albeit disappearing way of life (see fig. 28). The Newfoundland Quilt, while likely predating the moratorium, became a rising tradition under a time of duress.

Fig. 28 – Fishery Quilt Block by Odette and Pius Burke

Not only do we see a regional type of quilt – a quilt tailored to suit the expressive needs of a particular population—but we also see a quilt type that overtly expresses regionalism, to the degree that it is even named after the province within which it is being made. Robert Bishop, a quilt scholar responsible for the seminal work *New Discoveries in American Quilts* (1975), notes that the names of quilt patterns tend to reflect regional folklore (1975, 9). It is not surprising, then, that this quilt, even though it had a simple patchwork predecessor, should be named for this province, so rich in its sense of cultural identity. Bishop states, "Whatever the inspiration for the naming of a pattern, one can be certain that it was meaningful to the maker, for even the simplest quilt represented a considerable investment of time and energy" (1975, 9). In the case of the Newfoundland Quit, the naming of this relatively new tradition, and how it is practiced, reminds us that how important the tradition is to the group. According to Sims and Stephens, this is true of any prevalent tradition that a group practices: "As we delve into the subject of

tradition, we want to keep in mind that traditions exist because they mean something to those who partake in them" (2005, 87). How and why did the Newfoundland Quilt evolve and what exactly do they mean to the people who make them?

Due to their consistent design and pattern features, a Newfoundland Quilt may appear to be part of a static and conformist craft movement, but they are not. Quilting traditions in Newfoundland have undergone significant transformation in order to arrive at this particular quilt type, and they will continue changing as Newfoundland culture itself continues to change. As a new, derivative object, born from an older design, they are inherently emblematic of change and alteration— the opposite of conformity. This is nothing new in terms of how any tradition might play out within a community. Patrick Mullen brings awareness to this fact by pointing out that a tradition learned in one's youth inevitably sees change throughout a lifetime. Mullen states, "Tradition is not a static construct; rather, it is a dynamic ongoing process of interpretation and reconstruction of the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 276, cited in Mullen 1992, 2). He goes on to explain that since folk practices are "adapt to changing circumstances," skills and traditions that we are exposed to during our youth, will meet alterations throughout a lifetime (Mullen 1992, 3). Although the Newfoundland quilt is only twenty to twenty-five years old, all of the people who make them view their practice as being traditional. Since I am unable to determine if long-standing traditions are "more traditional" than newer traditions, I am willing to accept the prolific creation of these Newfoundland Quilts on the GNP, as traditional in nature. And it goes without saying, that quilting in general is a long-standing tradition in this region and so the Newfoundland Quilt can be viewed as a new take on an old tradition.

Aside from the idea of innovating traditions there is also the notion, presented by Hufford, of recycling traditions. She explains, "One relationship between the early and later stages of life involves the recycling of traditions older artists learned in youth" (1987, 25). Indeed, as presented in the quilter's profiles, many of those who make this quilt type, initially learned how to sew or quilt as children from their mothers. Only in rare cases did the quilter take textiles skills up in later life. Thinking back to what Mullen says about traditions undergoing transformation over the course of a person's lifetime (1992, 3), it is not surprising that quilting traditions on the GNP have accepted new, more decorative types in the years since quilts were not needed for warmth. If there is a tendency for people at advanced life stages to turn to traditions learned in early life, when they revisit that tradition, they will approach it from a contemporary framework. In the case of the GNP quilters, they turned to their childhood skill of quilting only to realize that new and expressive designs had been introduced into the repertoire of traditional quilt types. Perhaps interesting to note here is that for the quilters who had never made a Newfoundland Quilt before—there were seven informants who focused exclusively on non-figurative pieced quilts—the majority of them discussed wanting to eventually make a Newfoundland Quilt. I believe that they could detect, in this newer quilt type, an untapped expressive potential.

In my queries about what a new tradition is and how one might be derived, I again found myself concerned with ways in which the individual versus group identities are being created. Michael Owen Jones in his article " 'Tradition' in Identity Discourses and an Individual's Symbolic Construction of Self" (2000), notes that researchers have often focused their attentions on tradition as a "group practice" that influences a "collective

identity" (2000, 120). Although the Newfoundland Quilt is an individual effort, it can also be looked at as a group practice—the group being Newfoundlanders in general, Great Northern Peninsula residents more specifically, and then members of isolated communities with their own identifiable group identities. In looking at the quilt, it is clear the ways in which a group identity, grounded partly in regionalist sentiment, is being put forward, but does that supersede the quilt's ability to build individual identities? While not dismissing the role of tradition in contributing group identity, Jones narrows the scope of his studies to see how tradition functions for the individuals. In his work, he aims to "… examine tradition as symbolic construction in the activities and lifestyle of an individual who intentionally selects elements of what he or she conceives to be a tradition in order to fashion an identity articulated through various media (Jones 2000, 120). Applying this, we see that the GNP quilters, rather than feeling group pressure to proliferate this tradition, make a personal choice to make the Newfoundland quilt, and then choose which symbols to emboss, which fabrics to use as borders, where personal alterations can and should be made, and where they should not be made. For instance, in her selection of a crab symbol, Joyce etches part of her sense of self, by symbolically representing the days that she worked in the crab plant. "Conceiving" the Newfoundland Quilt to be a regional tradition, she is empowered in different ways, the most relevant having to do with personal creation of social identity.

Despite individual quilt making decisions, quilters tend to conform to an accepted overall quilt design, and an accepted range of figurative iconography as seen in the patterns. Doubtless however, is the fact that even though this generation of quilters appears to be clinging to what they consider a traditional design model, continual,

alterations to this model will likely pave the way for newer designs for the Newfoundland Quilt. I did encounter a few examples of such design innovations. Pius and Odette Burke, a husband and wife quilting duo, produced a Newfoundland Baby Quilt that deviated from the expected album design. Instead of featuring isolated symbols, it had various figurative Newfoundland images that were carried out in, what could be called, a free form or abstract landscape fashion (see fig. 29). It should be noted that Pius Burke, who is responsible for this particularly innovative design, exhibits a great deal of creative innovation in other ways too, and could be perceived as less traditional in all of his handicraft work. Pius and Odette are cognizant of their innovative designs to the point of stating that they liked to have something "different" than what other people are making.. Pius and Odette are also interesting in how they challenge the gender divide that exists in quilting practices. Pius, while he does not perform any of the sewing, *does* participate in design of the quilt. It is rare for males on the GNP to participate in quilting on any level so Pius is exceptional. They are a unique in how they collaborate, and the quilts they create are unique too.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most quilters were able to recognize their creative innovations, big or small, regardless if they outwardly celebrated them Like other types of craft making, the quilter does not want to make an *exact* replica of what another quilter is making. A similar quilt is desirable, but not an exact copy, and not a total departure either. In all this, I mean to suggest that quilts, and other forms of expressive folklore, are subject to transformation in the hands of the person disseminating it, yet there are still restrictions that help maintain an object's traditional orientation, as well as the group and individual identities that are being asserted.

Fig. 29 – Newfoundland Baby Quilt by Odette and Pius Burke

Quilt Origin Stories

When I brought up Newfoundland Quilts with some people they initially thought I was referring to the early patchwork quilt type. As previously stated, it became clear to me that these quilts remain a strong part of outport Newfoundland's collective memory and as we know, they have since been replaced by decorative quilts made for wholly different reasons. Robert Bishop addresses this movement from the crafting of utilitarian quilts to

decorative ones by discussing how quilting traditions evolved in American traditions according to what materials were available:

> As daily life became easier and many necessities could be purchased from a store instead of produced by hand at home, leisure time increased. No longer was it necessary for quilts to be purely utilitarian. A woman could now concern herself more with the decorative aspects of her handiwork … The name of the quilt pattern also assumed importance. Once a name was firmly established, it was handed down from one generation to the next, thus becoming a verbal tradition (Bishop 1975, 9).

It is interesting to think of how this is applicable to Newfoundland quilting traditions. Undeniable is the fact that the quilt faced a shift in function when more time could be spent on the decorative features. The Newfoundland Quilt type is indicative of that shift but it remains to be seen how long this new tradition will go into the future, how it will change, and whether or not the name, simple as it is, will stick. We can, however, look back and try to determine how this quilt evolved up to this point. To determine factors such as timeframes, origins, and certain elements around design and practice, I must rely on oral accounts, as there is a deficit of academic research on quilting traditions in Newfoundland. It therefore must be taken into account that some of the oral accounts I present may not be strictly factual. Certain individuals take claim for innovating designs, with stories that may or may not be true, and it is not my place to decide one way or the other. At first I did not know what to make of such claims but I have since learned that these issues are a fundamental part of collecting oral historical accounts. Patrick Mullen addresses the possibility of departures from "truth" in the following: "The past is viewed from the perspective of the present: when an old person tells a story about the past, it is not necessarily an absolutely factual account of the way things were; rather, the story is filtered through the imagination of the teller and influenced by what has happened in the

intervening years and by the current situation of the storyteller" (Mullen 1992, 3). With this in mind, I will present a few anecdotes around quilt origins precisely as I heard them, although an inherent part of the storyteller/listener relationship may be to meditate on what could be fact and what could be fiction.

When a tradition is passed along through the generations, one does not expect individual practitioners of that tradition to know its entire history. Of a newer tradition, one wherein people can recall a time when the tradition *did not* exist, one might assume that at least one quilter would have an idea of its evolution. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I aimed to find someone who could tell me where and when the Newfoundland Quilt came to be. I was sure to ask each quilter the following: "So, who started the Newfoundland Quilt?" It was a question that usually had the quilters stumbling to find an answer. During my conversations it repeatedly struck me that people did not know very much about the Newfoundland Quilt, how it originated, how long people had been making them, or which type came first. They offered answers, but these answers were so varied, vague or speculative, that it was difficult to draw conclusions about the quilt's history. In order to demonstrate the mysterious ways that a tradition can evolve, travel and flourish, it is worthwhile giving voice to some of the *quilt origin* conversations that I found myself in. A number of them went something like this one, where Myrtle, her daughter Debbie, and myself, discussed how long the quilt has been around:

> *Lisa*: Who started the Newfoundland Quilt?
> *Myrtle*: Well, I don't know. I don't know.
> *Lisa*: How old do you think it is?
> *Debbie*: I'd say it is very old.

> *Myrtle*: I don't think it is very old. Because I never saw them years ago, and I'm 63 years old and I never saw them till the last few years, right? So I mean, back there, they never ever done any.
> *Lisa*: Like when you were growing up you never saw any?
> *Myrtle*: No, no, they just done what we call the Old-Fashioned Patchwork Quilt, right?
> *Lisa*: So people have become more and more interested in doing them nowadays?
> *Myrtle*: Yes, I'd say.

Neither Myrtle nor her daughter could say where the idea came from and even though there was confusion over how old the tradition is, Myrtle convinced us that it could not be *very* old. Like many other quilt types, she just began "seeing them around" and decided to make one. Overall, this was an inconclusive conversation and I got the sense that many quilters were not concerned with where and when the quilt type came into practice.

But, as stated, I encountered a range of answers from the quilters – some more definitive than others. Gwen had a somewhat clearer idea about how old the tradition is and where the patterns originated. Despite this, she also had some uncertainties:

> *Gwen*: When the Newfoundland Quilt came about, I'm pretty sure it came about as a colored [crayon] quilt. It was only coloring book pages. Pretty much, that's what started, and they just got passed around.
> *Lisa:* Who started the Newfoundland Quilt?
> *Gwen*: I don't know. … I'd say if it is 25 years old, it is no more than that. When it started, it wasn't appliquéd. It was either colored, with fabric crayon, or embroidered. I seen a lot of them. But only in the past 10 years that I'd see appliqué.

According to Gwen, the first Newfoundland Quilt style was the crayon one, with the embroidered styles soon to follow, and the appliqué style only appearing in the past decade. She was fairly certain that this is how the tradition progressed in terms of quilt style but was not sure how long they have been made. Rita Parrill supported this trajectory by telling me: "Well, I believe this kind here, the crayon type, was the first."

Most other quilters disagreed, suggesting that the embroidered style came first. Naomi Wilcox believes that after the embroidered style appeared, the appliqué style was introduced, followed by the painted quilt as the most recent addition. In regards to the painted version, she said, "Painted came next. Painted only been here for a couple years." This is in sharp contrast to the trajectory Gwen offered. The contrary nature of this information leaves me with more questions than answers, and in my struggle to decipher this information it occurs to me that maybe it is not important which style came first, although the variance in these answers is interesting in itself.

Many quilters could not recall the first Newfoundland Quilt they had seen, making it difficult to determine how long they have been aware of the tradition. Marie Reid was a rare quilter who could actually recall the first time she was exposed to a Newfoundland Quilt.

> *Lisa:* Do you have any idea where it started, in Newfoundland?
> *Marie*: Well, I don't but, I think for us, Sister Walker started it off, the lady minister that we had here.
> *Lisa:* So she knew about it from somewhere?
> *Marie*: Yes. She did them years ago.

Marie then explained that Sister Walker, who was originally from somewhere in the States, was responsible for teaching many Roddickton women how to make patchwork quilts. She arrived in the region thirty-five to forty years ago, and started teaching these traditional skills soon after. When I asked how long ago Sister Walker began making Newfoundland Quilts, I was told, "Well she been gone, dead now for… she been dead twenty-one year. " Marie and Oliver believe that in the years before her death, she introduced the community to the concept of the Newfoundland Quilt, yet they do not know where Sister Walker first learned about them.

Naomi, also from Roddickton, provided a very different answer. Upon asking Naomi my quilt origin question, void of hesitation, she said the following:

> *Lisa*: And where did you first see the Newfoundland Quilt?
> *Naomi*: I done it.
> *Lisa:* First time you saw one, you did one?
> *Naomi:* I did it.

She accompanied her words with a nod of her head. I was silenced by this proclamation and did not think to ask, "But where did you first *hear* about this kind of quilt?" To see and to hear are obviously different, so it is possible that she heard about them, garnered an idea of what they look like, and began to make one accordingly. Or she could be taking claim for innovating the entire movement. Her words do not explicitly take credit for invention, but allude to it nonetheless. Interestingly, she was not the only quilter that I interviewed who made claims like this one.

While Gwen did not know where the Newfoundland Quilt originated, she did have an idea about who started the Wedding Quilt spin-off:

> *Lisa*: Where did the Wedding Quilt come from?
> *Gwen*: Right here (pointing at herself).
> *Lisa:* Was that *your* idea?
> *Gwen*: A lady called me up one time—a lady that had bought a lot of quilts off of me—and she said: " My daughter is getting married, could you make me a quilt?" I'm like, "You can't just say could you make me a quilt! What kind of quilt would you like?" She said, "I don't know what kind of quilt. I'd just like to have a nice quilt." I said, "Do you want something fancy dancy? Or do you want just a pieced quilt?" She said, "I'm going to leave it up to you, whatever you make." So she gave me nine months. I asked the color and she said, "Well I don't care." And I said, "I'd like to know the color of her wedding." So she gave me the wedding colors. The patterns, they're off wedding cards, off anything I could get my hands on. So I made quilt for her, and I said "Is she going to use this quilt?" and she said, "No I don't really think she will, I think it is gonna be on display, a keepsake." I said, "Okay." So I got her quilt done, I got it finished, I called her up and she came, and she cried and she cried. And I said, "So is it okay? " And she said, "It is so much better than okay."
> *Lisa:* So was it all wedding themed, the blocks?

Gwen: So one was a book shape, and it said 'Holy Bible' so on that I put 'Our Wedding,' and then there was – the first one I done was totally different than the ones I'm dong now.

This detailed account tells us the story of how Gwen's first Wedding Quilt came to be. She believes that it was the first quilt of this type in her region and considers herself the innovator. What I do not know is if Gwen had seen other Wedding Quilts that influenced how this one turned out. When I asked Marie about where she got the idea to make a Wedding Quilt, she did not know, leaving it open to the possibility that she saw Gwen's quilt, and decided to make her own. Marie did, however, have an idea about when she started seeing them and when she decided to make her own:

Lisa: Where did you get the idea to do a wedding quilt?
Marie: Well, I don't even know (laughter).
Lisa: I'm wondering about it because I think they are more of a recent tradition, Did you hear about them thirty years ago, or is it…
Marie: No. Hm, I've been making them twenty-two years, that's the Wedding Quilt.
Lisa: So they have been around for a while?
Marie: Yes! I think that was the first one I done.
Lisa: Where did the original idea come from? Do you have any idea?
Marie: No.

Marie also explained that the Wedding Quilt came some years after the Newfoundland Quilt. It is therefore safe to assume that the Newfoundland Quilt is upwards of twenty-five years. Unfortunately though, I was unable to find a quilt to view that was much older than six to eight years old. For this reason, I could not assess how other aspects of the quilt, such as design features, have evolved over time. It is a safe assumption, knowing how the evolution of craft operates, that the earlier quilts were different from the ones we see now. They likely carried a different range of symbols and cultural messages, but I have no way of knowing for sure. In response to the question of

how the use of symbols has changed over time, although the quilters acknowledged shifts in style, no one could remember the canon of symbols being any different from it is now.

Unspoken Boundaries

What left the biggest impression upon me during my investigation around identity is that there seem to be a number of unspoken rules about how a quilter can self-identify. Each in her own way, the women in this study are crafty, creative, even artistic, quilters. But why are they not allowed to acknowledge this out loud? They can recognize similar qualities about other women, but they are not supposed to celebrate these qualities in terms of their own personal identities. This fact opened up new questions for me: if such restrictions exist within the social dimension, are there greater freedoms within the material one? When women choose to make a Newfoundland Quilt, is her act exclusively about conformity to norms? Are there any other influences operating that allow for personal identity to come through? These queries lead me to looking at folk art traditions to see what constitutes a folk art object, how folk art is connected to identity, and what kind of creative freedoms individual craftspeople have within folk traditions.

IV

Folk Art and Aesthetics

The noticeable conflict between consistency and variation in the Newfoundland Quilt tradition had me wondering what factors influenced how a single quilt would turn out. The role of aesthetics in particular became of interest to me when I noticed that many of the quilts I was viewing, strictly from an aesthetics standpoint, were difficult for me to understand. I began to wonder what aesthetic rules were operating that welcomed stylistic choices that I consider somewhat unconventional. Why do women use paint and crayon? Why is the tartan such a popular fabric? Why are imperfect drawings acceptable? Even some of the appliqué symbols were loose renderings and therefore outside of what I would have expected to see. In these quilts, I saw what I consider a kind of folk art aesthetic. This aesthetic is under a sphere of influences that include individual tastes and skills, as well as regional expectations. To understand how these factors were all working together, I will first attempt to define folk art and apply that definition to the quilts. Then I will move into a discussion on how aesthetics, taste, skill, and talent influence the quilt making process. What will quickly become apparent is that some of these issues are difficult to talk about definitively. Folk art, aesthetics and taste, for instance, are complex, subjective and even abstract concepts, and with no quilter able to speak directly on these topics, many of my conclusions are bound to be riddled with bias.

Newfoundland Quilts as Folk Art Objects

Approaching and using the expression *folk art* has never been simple for those studying art practices. It is an expression that suggestively implies inferiority, yet at the same time, folk art is celebrated for its unique properties. This inherently makes folk art difficult to

understand. Henry Glassie in his *book The Sprit of Folk Art* (1989), while not providing a simple definition of folk art, illuminates some of the special messages carried within folk art traditions:

> It is one message of folk art that creativity is not the special right of the rare individual. It is the common property of the human races. It is another message of folk art that creativity need not lead to the destruction of norms. It can be dedicated to the perfection of things as they stand (1989, 88)

Glassie explains that folk art can offer creative freedom and expression for any individual, whether or not they are artists. In this, we are reminded that folk art can offer an expressive outlet to all members of a community, meanwhile remaining attentive to important cultural norms that are in place within that community. But a question remains: What exactly *is* folk art?

Glassie believes that in order to come to an understanding of folk art, we first must come to an understanding of ourselves (1989, 42). He states, "To understand folk art, we must clarify our understanding of ourselves, bringing it into such order that we can hold it aside when meeting others in contexts of their won. We must eliminate the familiar to become familiar with the alien" (1989, 24). By looking at our own lives, and acknowledging the contexts that bring about the various parts of our individual worlds, we can begin to see where folk art comes from. This in itself seems to be a difficult endeavor. Michael Bird, on the other hand, attempts to untangle the dichotomous and complex nature of folk art by providing clear definitions and meaningful ways of understanding such artwork. He opens his discussion by addressing the inherent complexity held within the terminology: "In a sense, the term 'folk art' itself is paradoxical. The first word suggests something common and ordinary, belonging to the people, while the second implies the unique quality of individual inspiration" (1983, 1).

How can something be ordinary and unique at the same time? And why does this mix of qualities end up in some ways debasing the object? Bird goes on to explain that the tension between an object's properties is perhaps a prominent feature of the best folk art objects (1983, 1). In folk art, including the Newfoundland Quilt, we see "A mixture of naivety and sophistication, tradition and innovation, cultural repetition and individual invention" (1983, 1). And again, as with the Newfoundland Quilt, folk art simultaneously gleans from the past, while propelling ahead with fresh approaches (1983, 1). Using Bird's assessment of folk art, it is easy enough to see that the work of the GNP quilters fits into a *folk art* categorization. There is a tension between the technical sophistication of these quilts, and the simplicity and repetition of the image blocks. Then there is a tension between individual and group expectations, as well as traditional and innovative forms. But why is this categorization important? What can it tell us?

Bird introduces two terms that can be used to assist in recognizing a craftsperson's underlying motive for making folk art. The first term, *idiosyncratic*, brings awareness to how a maker comes from an individualistic approach when creating an object. The second term, *ethnosyncratic*, reminds us that a handmade object may also be under the influence of a maker's ethnicity or ethnic community (1983, 1). Michael Owen Jones, in his piece "Aesthetics of Everyday Life" (2001), supports Bird's postulations. In the following, we can see how Jones draws similar conclusions about how environmental influences and informal direction give the craftsperson a framework from which an object can be made, despite the lack of formal training:

> In regard to other aesthetic forms in everyday life, people without formal training in art do not necessarily work in isolation from others' inspiration, influence, or instruction, nor is their behavior wholly idiosyncratic. Typically they learn forms, designs, choices of materials, and standards of excellence and preference from

> people with whom they interact and communicate as well as through systematic, purposeful observation of objects in their environment (including mass produced and disseminated items) (2001, 56-7).

Both Bird and Jones stress that there are a combination of influences at work, and that a craftsperson's "behavior" can never be exclusively self-motivated. Bird further points out how different folk art practices are born from either one or the other camp, he also points out that "the power of expression" is what attracts us, regardless of which place the object comes from (1983, 2). For the Newfoundland Quilt, there is unmistakably individual expressiveness in each quilt, but overall, it is a community-derived concept, informed by a common geographic location and ancestry. In this sense, the communal aspect of the quilt takes precedence, despite the individualistic decision-making that goes into each and every quilt. Bird would likely agree with my suggestion that the Newfoundland Quilt is a largely ethnosyncratic endeavor, especially considering the nostalgic expressions held within the quilt. In fact, he states that a "nostalgically-inclined" folk artist might be more attracted to making ethnosyncratic folk art (1983,2). As will become apparent in subsequent discussions, the Newfoundland Quilt attempts to tell a story of a past way of life, exhibiting nostalgic imagery, and thoughtfully bringing memories of those days into present times.

So, as a folk art object, what other implications might the Newfoundland Quilt have? Bird explains the powerful role of folk art for individuals and the communities they live in:

> For all its simplicity, folk art appears to offer both the maker and the observer something more than aesthetic enjoyment; it can also provide a sense of order, structure, and continuity. There is little doubt that individuals often experience a kind of self-affirmation through creative activities. At the same time, communities are strengthened by the commonality of their visual arts (1983, 4).

Here, he describes the dynamic nature of creative acts and the resulting objects. Bird believes that folk art stimulates a sense of "order, structure, and continuity," for the maker, and observer, too, and he is not alone in this belief (1983, 4). Bronner, in his work on American chain carvers, came to a similar conclusion. In his epilogue he cites Doris Francis-Erhard stating, "For all, creativity is a link between past and present and gives a sense of continuity and community" (1985, 152). Making and observing folk-art can help strengthen communities by "the commonality of their visual arts." This is because the Newfoundland Quilts are part of a pervasive craft practice that generates objects that are familiar to members of a community. This creates a feeling of connectivity between makers of these objects, and their audience—an audience that includes community members, near and far. But in his use of the word *commonality* is Bird also making reference to the appearance of folk art objects? Why do these quilts look the way they do? What spheres of influence are at work?

Issue of Aesthetics and Taste

When looking at a quilt, one can assume that certain design decisions are under the influence of aesthetics. But what are aesthetics and how are they engaged during the quilt-making process? According to Sims and Stephens, aesthetics revolve around an "understood set of standards" and a way of discussing these standards (2005, 164). Upon viewing an object, an emotional and intellectual response is generated. In Jones' 1971 article on aesthetics, he describes this response: "The aesthetic response involves the appreciation of the object as a perceptual form and the emotional and intellectual satisfaction gained from a contemplation of the form and its presented or suggested meanings" (1971, 103). This response and its associated standards are interesting to

folklorists because they help illuminate which elements of an artistic object are valued by a group. Certain standards might speak of how a community evaluates or perceives the artistic expressions that they value and proliferate (Sims and Stephens 2005, 156). There are aesthetic qualities of all Newfoundland Quilts that are shared, such as color and fabric use, and overall style, but are all aspects of an artistic expression subject to such communal standards? Can aesthetic standards ever be violated?

In essence, the aesthetic standards of Newfoundland's textile traditions are under two primary influences—community expectations and individual innovations. Gerald L. Pocius describes how these two influences are balanced in the following: "In Newfoundland, the tradition to a large extent dictates that form and construction should closely follow the cultural mental template. Cosmetic factors, especially with quilts and mats, is not dictated by such a rigid template, and thus characterized by widespread innovation" (Pocius 1979b, 61). He explains that accepted forms, such as the quilt's overall style, are derived from a "cultural mental template" but recognizes that some aspects of production are not under the influence of such templates (1979b, 61). Outside of the rigidity of form and construction, there is freedom for quilters to be creative in how they choose to embellish their quilts. The symbols that appear on the quilt tend to be more personalized than the quilt's other features. Never though, do the larger community and its standards vanish completely. Even though Joyce is a quilter who makes extra efforts to put her own sense of style in her work, she still abides by the group's expectations. This can be seen in how she discussed a particular symbol that she had put on a many of her quilts. Comparing two different pitcher plant symbols that she has on two different quilts she says, "This is the pitcher plant. This is the pitcher plant they got

now. This is the pitcher plant they got before. A couple years ago they changed it." She never specifies who "they" are, but in using that word she alludes to some greater community that makes changes to patterns, and either accepts or rejects them based on aesthetic standards. This new pitcher plant pattern was accepted, and now Joyce chooses to use the newer design, rather than the old one. In a single quilt, then, we can see individual innovation, such as Joyce's creative take on the sealing symbol, and adherence to group expectations, such as the use of the new pitcher plant icon.

The inherent subjectivity of aesthetics makes it difficult to draw concrete conclusions about how they operate, but is the role of taste any different? What I might consider an aesthetic violation may not be considered a violation by someone else, and regardless, is still valuable in what it tells us. A few different appliquéd fishermen, on two different quilts, raised my eyebrows. One happens to look like a leprechaun (see Fig. 30) and the other has disproportionate hands (see fig. 31). I wondered why these two quilters were satisfied with these images when they could be viewed as unusual. According to Jones, such apparent "violations" hint at a range of factors including a person's sense of taste, creative processes, or even the network of social relations in which the art object is produced (Jones 1973, 19). But what is taste then, and how is it different from aesthetics? Even though they are similar and over-lapping concepts, they do have differences. Citing Jones, Sims and Stephens explain that beneath aesthetic reaction lies the realm *taste* (2005, 165). They tell us "…taste is about what we don't like" (2005, 165). While aesthetics involves a response to how something looks, taste can indicate a range of deeper cultural meanings. Jones states that taste does not operate according to constants but includes "… such factors as the nature and purpose of the

object created, personal values deriving from one's experiences and goals as well as from the internalization of group values, and one's sensitivity, ability to apperceive, and experience in the evaluation of the objects that are judged" (1971, 104). Just like aesthetics, taste is altogether individualistic and subjective, but at the same time, collaborative and predictable. The woman who made the appliqué fisherman icon *likes* how it looks. It does not matter if I find it unusual or malformed because it falls in line with *her* personal sense of taste and aesthetic inclinations. It should be noted that this particular quilt was owned by a non-quilter, who showed it to me. The owner of the quilt found it to be beautiful, and had it on permanent display in a spare bedroom. The quilt was accepted by her, indicating a shared sense of taste and aesthetic. The role of taste in quilt making then, involves an individual's set of visual choices based upon a range of values and attitudes, stemming from personal experiences and shared cultural experiences. This means that sometimes the resulting visual effect is sometimes shared by members of a community, and sometimes not.

Left: Fig 30 – Appliqué Fisherman Icon By Myrtle Lewis
Right: Fig. 31 – Appliqué Fisherman Icon by Inga Coombs

I was exposed to a broad range of different styles and tastes through the quilt tops, but they all appeared to be informed by similar influences. I never saw a quilt that was *too* abstract or divergent. While such boundaries clearly exist, as does a negotiation between personal and communal values, there is a range of different looks and styles that are considered acceptable in the Newfoundland Quilt icon canon. This made me wonder whether or not a quilter *could* actually transgress boundaries, and if so, how this transgression of aesthetics would be perceived. I believe that even when personal taste, style and aesthetic standards are being employed, the work may still be subject to group judgments. There is still an undeniable idea of how a Newfoundland Quilt should look. In some sense then, innovation, while encouraged, is also limited. Pocius addresses this by explaining why such limitations might exist. He states, "In folk cultures, aesthetics may depend on the existence of a specific mental template touching on one or more of these three [form, construction, cosmetics] components of the artifact. Unselfconsciously, such a template is used to maintain the stability of the self-adjusting tradition by providing a clear notion of what is "good" from generation to generation" (Pocius 1979b, 61). Although the Newfoundland Quilt has yet to go from generation to generation, it is already conforming to a series of evolving aesthetic templates, meanwhile asserting itself as a verifiable tradition with distinctive aesthetic boundaries.

While viewing a wide range of quilts, I noticed a number that appeared less professional or less technical, that were still considered legitimate within the tradition. Where did these variations come from? Why are they so readily accepted? Michael Owen Jones in his 1973 article "Violations of Standards of Excellence and Preference in Utilitarian Art" aims to unravel the role of aesthetic standards that may in place in folk

art traditions. He suggests that when violations to aesthetic occur, and the object is not accepted, it reflects back on the craftsperson as being without skill or technical ability (1973, 19). These kinds of judgments however, are usually made from outside of the crafting community (1973, 20). Meanwhile, the community may have already accepted the object and are oblivious or inattentive to outsider's attitudes. During my fieldwork, I ran into very few incidents of aesthetic criticism. While it is possible that criticisms are more likely to come from people who do not make quilts, non-quilters appeared to be very accepting of all quilt types, even if they appeared to be in violation of standards. Quilts that I thought would be judged for their poor execution were admired and coveted by the non-quilters I met and spoke with. It seems that there is a high level of acceptance from both within and outside of the quilting community. It struck me that what I considered a violation of aesthetics was not considered a violation by anyone else around me. My biases were thus illuminated, and my status as an outsider was reaffirmed. Jones addresses this gap in how an "investigator" might perceive a folk art object, reminding that falling into bias and judgment can obscure understandings about folk art traditions. He explains in the following:

> Objects of folk manufacture, or forms of traditional and conventionalized modes of expression, may fail to fulfill the expectations of some investigators conditioned to their own cultural heritage, but it is doubtful that disparaging comments or the desperate use of vacuous epithets will engender an understanding of the total tradition of folk art (Jones 1973, 22).

Even though I saw quilts that I did not understand, I am fastidious in putting such judgments aside in order to gain a fuller understanding of the tradition. I am left wondering though, what is it about being an insider that ensures a high level of acceptance of folk objects? In terms of the Newfoundland Quilt, it could have less to do

with taste/aesthetics and more with the regionalist attitudes that the quilt is expressing. Keeping in mind that the quilt carries symbols meaningful to residents of the GNP, it is possible that issues of taste are secondary to importance of the symbols. This is not unheard of in the manufacturing of folk objects. Jones verifies that we tend to associate objects with various life incidents, lending a bias to the object:

> This association between the object and some other event in one's life seems not only to dispose one favorably toward the object, regardless of whether or not it is objectively beautiful or its structure can be identified as producing a certain emotional response, but also to guarantee the acceptance of the form of expression in a producer or a performer's repertoire (Jones 1971, 99).

A quilt that an outsider may not accept based upon how it looks, is more likely to be accepted by a local who sees the quilt as both meaningful and regionally important. When viewing a Newfoundland Quilt as an outsider, it is important to keep in mind how different influences are in operation, and how an ostensibly simple decision on behalf of the quilt might be derivative of a complexity of influences. While taste plays a role in how an individual quilts looks as finished product, it is a maker's sense of shared identity, and her willingness to conform to this identity, that brings the quilt's construction in the first place. If a quilter does not want to contribute to this particular quilting tradition, and there are some indeed, or if they cannot relate to that identity being reified, or if their personal taste falls outside of the boundaries of the quilt, they can simply choose to not make one.

Issue of Skill and Talent

Unlike abstractions such as aesthetics and taste, issues of skill and talent are approachable, and within the realm of what quilters were able to discuss.

Quilt construction is a tangible process that takes both skill and patience. Pye defines the word *construction* as "…making a whole out of parts, by connecting them" (1964, 47). He goes on to explain that the act of *connection* may be done by "…interpenetrating, as in a carpenter's joints or a riveted joint, or by interlocking, as in spinning or weaving, or be welding, or by jointing with an adhesive" (1964, 47). As with any handmade quilt, the construction of Newfoundland Quilt involves measuring, cutting and interlocking bits of carefully selected fabric, then sewing together each piece together with practiced accuracy. The need for skill and accuracy became all the more obvious to me when I attempted to make an appliquéd wall hanging, under the attentive guidance of Gwen Patey. Steps in the quilting process that were difficult for me, I watched her execute with complete ease. I required her assistance at every step. The finished product has been referred to as: "A quilt that only a mother could love." From the perspective of someone attempting to quilt for the first time, I am in tune with the range of skills and involved. The GNP quilters, for the most part, have the luxury of long-term exposure and practice starting from a young age. But what is skill and how does it impact the way a finished quilt will look? Pye refers to *skill* as the "application of dexterity" but excludes the "know-how" that one might use in design (1964, 55).

Like how aesthetics are formulated through group agreement, skill can also be subject to the norms of a group. Citing Pocius, Sims and Stephens explain how skill and talent operate:

> Skill includes individual expressive details created by artists and performers, within limits agreed upon by artists and audiences, within given folk groups. According to Gerald Pocius, skill is a defining characteristic of art in general, but skill itself is culturally determined, and depends on the audience or viewer's determination of how much talent the artist has to have to create a particular work (Pocius 1995, 423) (Sims and Stephens 2005, 160).

Whether the GNP quilters are aware of it or not, they are applying a set of skills that aid them in the construction of a quilt. Indeed, as Pye informs us: "Skill will be wanted in making almost anything which, like a special determining-system, is made singly and not in quantity" (1964, 57). Skill *on top of* know-how, allows the individual quilters to engage in the entire process with considerable success. Not all women who make quilts necessarily have this know-how and a viewer of an object may notice this in the aesthetic appearance of an object. While women were hesitant to make aesthetic or taste judgments about other quilts, they were able to express dissatisfaction with the technical aspects of a quilt, or any obvious lack of "know-how." Milspaw found something similar in her study of regional quilt practices:

> Quilters have definite ideas about what is and is not appropriate in a quilt. Technical virtuosity is the foremost consideration. Quilters everywhere freely criticize sloppy work—seams that are too narrow or uneven, blocks that don't meet one another squarely, unintended asymmetry of design or color, uneven border edges, and long or uneven quilting stitches (Milspaw 1997, 378).

Although it was rare for me to encounter criticisms, it did happen. The following examples came from a quilter who openly analyzed locally produced quilts based on their technical and design merits. This kind of voicing of opinion was very rare, and this is the only example of a quilter who openly expressing distaste for the overall aesthetic of a quilt.

> Next time you go Quirpon way, go into the local restaurant. They have a Newfoundland Quilt in there, against the back wall, and it is terrible patterns. I don't mean the work, I mean the patterns themselves. It is terrible what I'm going to say, God forgive me: It is really ugly and I don't mean the work. The mummers that I use are like, people. Those were just like, blobs. They're asking $395.00 for that quilt. ... I'm like, "Oh my god, that is a bad quilt." It's okay, I knew what it was, because I mean, I've been around mummers all my life, but for someone from away? "What are those lumps right there?"

In this she is implying that the patterns used for this quilt had either lost their shape, or were poorly rendered and consequently looked like, in her words, "a bowl of Jell-o." The "work" was acceptable, meaning the quilter had skill, but the design features were poor, meaning she was lacking a discerning taste or design know-how.

Excluding this one incident where "unintended asymmetry" was outwardly frowned upon, criticism usually focused on technical aspects of a quilt. Again it was rare, but I did encounter such technical criticisms. For instance, those who did embroidered image blocks had their stitches studied by other quilters, and when a mistake was made, it would be pointed out. During my own attempt to learn the herring bone stitch (commonly used on appliqué quilts) from Naomi, she shook her head in disapproval at my stitches and told me that they needed lots of work. I was just learning, so it was expected, and I appreciated the candor. This experience informed me that a high standard of ability is expected and required for engaging in textile traditions.

I encountered another example of this in the community of Quirpon, which is small, even for the GNP. Many of the women here are quilters and all of these quilters know one another. They are therefore familiar with each other's work. Some quilters here believe that a specific technical standard must be upheld, while others do the best they can, with the level of skill and know-how that they have. Those with higher technical standards and abilities, tend to dismiss the quilts made by the supposedly less-capable quilters. One reason for such outward attitudes might have to do with the proximity of a certain craft shop. A few of the quilters I met sell their crafts here, while others choose not to. This appeared to create a tension in the community. It was suggested to me that if a quilter wanted to sell quilts to people from outside of the community, certain technical

expectations must be met first. Of course, not all quilts meet this level of expectation, and this generated judgment from some people. At one point I was told, "I would never try to sell a quilt without properly folded corners the way that *she* does." But the quilter in question, despite the fact that her quilt is not of the highest technical quality, finds her own work to be sufficient. It isn't that she *cannot* fold her corners correctly, it is that she chooses not to. It is a step that she is willing to forgo, as she is still able to reach her own standards without that technical detail. This kind of talking-down of other local quilters occurred a few different times during my field visits. For some the quilters I met, their long hours of work gave them confidence in their opinions about skill and technique, or lack thereof. There is a technical standard that some quilters hold themselves to, and even quietly impose on other quilters.

The issue of talent is inherently connected to that of skill. In general, talent is regarded as being naturally skillful. I had many opportunities to ask quilters whether or not they considered themselves talented. While they could unanimously agree that quilting took skill, no one was willing to admit that they had talent. Some would go quiet when I suggested it, and others would shake their heads in denial. When Oliver exclaimed, "She's really talented, isn't she?" about his wife, she just smiled and refused to comment. If it is not talent, then what is it that the quilters have? I was interested to see how quilters regarded talent, and have come to realize that whether they believe they are talented or not, it is considered unacceptable to carry this as part of their personal identity. The following exchange illuminates the way in which some quilters look at these issues:

> *Lisa*: So you use the pattern, and then you paint it on, but you have to know how to paint to be able to do it.

Debbie: It takes some time is all.

That "it takes time" means she believes anyone could do what she does, if they take the time to learn. While this may in fact be true, her statement reveals a refusal to openly consider herself talented. At the same time, her mother Myrtle verbally revered Debbie's paintings (see fig. 32). Quilters can refer to each other as talented within the dynamic; they just cannot apply it to themselves. Gwen is another person who spoke of quilters that she admired for their talent, but when I asked questions about her own, she was dismissive.

> *Gwen*: I've tried to draw too, and people are like "Oh it is so hard, you have a talent for it!" and I'm like, " No, I don't!" I can put all those details in freehand and all that, but you got people who can't do it even when the detail is put on with a pattern. I never ever thought that it's a talent. I'm not very talented, you know? And I never ever looked at it cause I guess I grew up with it all my life and people would say "My god, you're so talented, look what can do!" And I say. "It is not talent, it is just something I do." What do you think talent is? Like I said, I always grew up with it. It just come natural. It wasn't something …
> *Lisa*: You also had to work at it too.
> *Gwen*: Well, I mean, you didn't start out being able to make what you can make now.

Even though her skills come "natural" to her, she has a difficult time referring to herself as talented—it is something she denies every time it is suggested. Even though it is just something that she does, she states that you have to work hard at it. Her question is an appropriate one: What do you think talent is? She did not provide an answer to this question, and I cannot think of how to answer it either. When Gwen admits that other quilters cannot achieve the same level of detail that she can, she is conceding to the fact that perhaps there is talent involved, but it is a veiled proclamation. Is she saying that talent is rare, and it involves a being capable of a specific level of detail? I do not know,

but I do know that Gwen is a professional and prolific quilter who can certainly be categorized as talented from an outsider's perspective.

Fig. 32 – Painted Wolf Block by Debbie Reynolds

Freedom in the Icons

Perhaps unbeknownst to her, Gwen's quilting practices and her attitudes thereto, demonstrate the complex dynamics between talent, skill, and perceptions about these factors in a folk context. Specific communal standards and expectations are in place and demand that a quilt's overall appearance follows the group expectations. Despite this fact, the self-determination of the craftsperson cannot be filtered out of the object-making process. Nor can an individual's taste, her style choices, skills and abilities, her natural talents, nor her own technical standards—all of these will be played out in a single quilt.

This leads to great variation within the tradition. A quilter can choose a style, and then follow that style using her own choice of colors, fabrics, techniques, and most importantly, which patterns she wants to use, and how she wants them to look. For GNP quilter who is making a Newfoundland Quilt, the greatest creative freedom she has lies in the canon of icons she selects and renders for her quilt top. As long her quilted album of symbols and images remain connected to the cultural experience of Northern Newfoundland, she can make her icons look any way that she wishes.

Now that it is clearer why an individual's quilt and its icons tend to look the way they do, it is important to think about possible reasons that a particular icon was chosen by a quilter to begin with. Is it simply because she likes the look of the pattern, or is there something more behind these kinds of design decisions? By looking at the symbols themselves, and attempting to piece together their possible meanings, we can get closer to answering these kinds of questions.

V

The Symbols and Imagery

In order to be selected for a quilt top, we know that the images have to be of regional significance. But are there any other factors that influence why a symbol is chosen? From what I've gathered, Newfoundland Quilt symbols glean from Newfoundland culture, past and present, according to three different categories. The first category involves nationality, as seen in depictions of the Newfoundland and Labrador flags, and monuments such as the Cabot Tower. The second category involves images of daily subsistence. These images might include anything from a chopping wood, berry picking and hanging laundry, to an icon of a rabbit, caribou, or moose. The third category focuses on scenes from the pre-industrial past in outport Newfoundland. Icons from this category might include net-mending scenes, fetching water from a well, and historic objects such as outhouses, grindstones and oil lamps. According to what I have noticed, there are more than forty acceptable quilt symbols to choose from in the canon, but its difficult to say exactly how many. New scenes and icons are always being innovated and put into use, and once an image appears on one quilt, given that is has been accepted by the group, you can be sure to start seeing it on others. Then there are the limitless personal takes on each symbol, making some of the more unique looking ones difficult to compare with more familiar patterns.

Ultimately, I wanted to understand why quilters choose the specific symbols that they choose? Why quilt a moose? Why a Newfoundland flag? During each fieldwork visit, I would try to ask questions about specific icons. Interestingly, this line of questioning never went very far. It seems that many quilters do not choose symbols for

any conscious reason, or at least ones that they were able to express verbally. The following is an exchange that I had with Inga about her pattern choices:

> *Lisa*: What inspires the images? What makes you decide what to put on it?
> *Inga*: (long pause) Every one got the same thing on it.
> *Lisa*: How many have you done in this style?
> *Inga*: Hmm, about thirty.

Later on, Inga is able to recognize that most of what she wants on her quilt, "belongs to Newfoundland." She may not pay close attention to each and every pattern choice, but overall, it is all about Newfoundland, regardless of whether she has deeply personal connections to the images. Inga uses the same patterns for each of her quilts, and it seems that she is following an overall template observed from other quilts. She believes, "When you sees one, you sees 'em all." While she does find ways to innovate, particularly in her paint color choices, her work is closely aligned with what she thinks is expected of a Newfoundland Quilt. I would not say that this kind of detachment to personalization is the norm, but still, it was difficult for some quilters to express what the images meant to them. It could be that they did not know *why* they chose a certain symbol. Maybe they just liked the look of it, or the image reminded them of something. Perhaps, some quilters are sub-consciously expressing a specific memory or belief. Or, maybe they thought they *had* to include certain images. Regardless, very few people provided personal stories when displaying their quilted symbols.

Considering the fact that each symbol is inherently meaningful, it is possible that the images simply speak for themselves—the quilter does not have to say a word about how her choices reflect her life experiences, they are right there on the quilt. Henry Glassie in "Studying Material Culture Today" (1991), postulates that objects embody a kind of language, and therefore do not always need the backing of words. He states, "The

artifact is as direct an expression, as true to the mind, as dear to the soul, as language, and, what is more, it bodies forth feelings, thoughts, and experiences elusive to language" (1991, 255). Considering the value of this observation, it occurs to me that I may have been misdirected in my questions. Perhaps these quilts, with their tidy symbols, are made as an expression too deep for words.

In this chapter I would like to exhibit and discuss some of the more frequently occurring iconography. In many cases, I can only guess what these depictions mean on a personal level, to the women who select them. Yet the symbols' intended meanings are clear, and their historic and regional relevance most obvious—the symbols *are* a reflection of life on the peninsula. This section will be quite visual but, wherever possible, I will attempt to put the symbol into a regional context. This might involve an anecdote from a quilter, or use of reference materials, or even my own observations from my fieldwork journeys. In providing this information, I intend to support the vital link between the symbol and reality on the Great Northern Peninsula. This "reality" lends itself an undeniable pattern in the kinds of sentiments roused. Most, if not all of the symbols, exhibit unique aspects of daily life in Newfoundland, whether around lifestyle or ecology, past or present. Even if unintentional, by quilting such images, a regionalist attitude is being put forward. On the other hand, when an aspect of regional culture *from the past* is being quilted, a kind of nostalgia is being expressed and the quilt becomes a tool for triggering memories. Although nostalgia and regional identity should be treated separately, as they are distinctive modes of expression with their own set of meanings and functions, the two are not mutually exclusive. When studying specific quilt icons, it will be clear that sometimes both considerations will be present during the interpretation.

Before viewing the symbols and demonstrating the dual presence of regionalism and nostalgia, it is important to give these two concepts attention, in order to understand how they operate, and how they might impact the creation of a material object.

Regionalism

It is undeniable that the Newfoundland Quilt is a traditional practice that is unique to this Canadian province. Canada has been described by Pocius as a "country of regions" with each region striving for self-definition (1991, 243). Could it be that the Newfoundland Quilt is part of a process of self-definition? I believe so. This prevalence of this regional quilt type demonstrates a widespread desire to establish definitive indications of identity. Yvonne Milspaw has found that this is true of regional quilts in other places. She explains in the following: "In spite of the paucity of direct evidence, especially in the case of quilts, we have correctly assumed that folk material culture can be a specific marker of both region and ethnicity, and folk arts have been described, mostly intuitively, in terms of regional variations" (1997, 364). It is important to note that other provinces may have similar quilts, but they would certainly demonstrate a different set of meaningful symbols. The Newfoundland Quilt and its array of icons is clearly a regional variation, found on this Island alone.[3] But in what ways is the Newfoundland Quilt a "marker of region?" How do individual quilter's express and proliferate regionalist attitudes? In his article "Assessing Regional Identity Amidst Change: The Role of Vernacular Studies," Kingston Wm. Heath describes how regional identity is established within communities. Although he writes in response to vernacular architecture, his introductory ideas are

[3] Gerald L. Pocius gives an important warning against 'unique-itis' in *Living in a Material World* (1991). He states that, "…if every aspect of a particular region is so unique, any communication of information can only be on the researcher's terms (1991, 243).

applicable to other types of craft. He states, "Obviously, there are some recurring points of congruence that tie long-time inhabitants of a locale to a place in a collective way. This collective heritage is often the product of shared work and recreational patterns, common ethnic and economic bonds shared social and spiritual values, and actual or invented historical identities. These regional commonalities, in turn, produce shared mental attitudes, sensibilities, and associations" (2006/2007, 76). All of the identity indicators provided by Heath are true of the Great Northern Peninsula. Given the small size of GNP communities, and the relative isolation of both the peninsula and the individual settlements, it is clear that a strong sense of regional identity is present. The quilt, in the context of regional identity, is an expression of this "collective heritage" and the "actual or invented historical identities." It is a shared sense of identity that translates into a regionalist expression—a tribute to the many factors that make their culture distinctive.

Heath then enters a discussion on how "collective forces" become a kind of "regional filter." This filter is under the influence of such factors as "…climatic, cultural, social, political, economic, and religions factors" (2006/2007, 79). Above these categories, are the categories of "high style," "popular" and "folk" (2006/2007, 79). Considering the demographics of the GNP quilters, it is likely that the concept of their quilt first travels down though the "folk" category. As the quilter assesses what kind of meaning they want to imbue into their quilt, it then travels through a regional filter. As the idea moves through this filter, it also moves through a set of conventions that ultimately results in a vernacular form (Heath 2006/2007, 80). In terms of the Newfoundland Quilt, the concept of the quilt is born from a vernacular perspective, and is

then designed and formulated to reflect regional ideals. In her essay "Conceiving a Quilt," Paula Gustafson explains the early stages of quilt making for the quilter. She says, "As well as envisioning her completed quilt, the quilter often incorporates one or more levels of meaning into her quilt" (2002, 202). As a quilt, its design, style, and patterns move through the regional filter, a quilter willfully ascribes meaning, both individual and collective, into the quilt top. Heath notes however, that traditional craft, such as quilt making, may be "…so culturally engrained among local inhabitants that the original motivation behind certain acts proceeds largely with unspoken familiarity" (2006/2006, 84). Even though conscious acts of creativity and expression are still present, the basic "vernacular elements" have long since been established. This is certainly true for many quilters I spoke to. Even though a regionalist message was inherent in the quilt, some women just incorporated icons because they were pre-ordained, and were thought to be necessary in the making of such a quilt. For many, the symbols were not used in a conscious way to give the quilt a particular meaning. While this fact is worthy of noting, it is also true that meaning, whether consciously ascribed or not, is still present in each and every quilt. Also clear is the fact that everyone I interviewed pledged love for where they live. One example of many came from Naomi. When I asked if she liked living in Roddickton she told me, "Oh, I loves it here. I went to Kitchener once, six weeks. You can't get me back there no more."

Nostalgia

As I talked to the quilters, it became more and more clear to me that they were making craft out of a complex set of life factors, some of which I could observe through attention to their quilts. I began to notice how prevalent certain historical imagery was on the quilt tops. I wondered whether or not these quilts were attached to personal memories the

quilters have. Through such queries I came to believe that the Newfoundland Quilt is a kind of "memory object" (1989, 331). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that in the face of upheaval, change and discontinuity, people tend to find creative coping mechanisms (1989, 331). She believes, "Some individuals create *memory objects* as a way to materialize internal images, and through them, to recapture earlier experiences" (1989, 331). Given the multiple readings one can make of the iconography, it is clear that at least one reading of the imagery is that it is a tool for reminiscence and memory. Depictions of historic objects and long-past ways of life find themselves on the quilt tops. I mentioned before that that quilters were predominantly quiet about their symbols but there *were* times that a quilter would point to specific block, and provide an anecdote or reflection that the symbol stirred for her. Objects such as oil lamps, rocking chairs, or wood-burning stoves were resonant for some women, as they seemed to have sentimental associations with these particular icons. Bronner explains the connection between objects and the memories that they ask us to relive: "Since folk objects commonly have to do with everyday life – the needs of shelter, work, prayer, and play – objects may help us to re-experience something of that everyday past" (1986, 202). In this case, the object is the quilt, or the quilt blocks, and the quilt is not only rooted in "everyday life" but it tells the story of everyday life on its surface. Both the quilt and its symbols help the quilters to engage with the past in a creative and visual way. In their reverence for such iconography, the quilters are expressing nostalgia. But why are the quilters nostalgic in the first place?

In his article "Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave" (1977), Fred Davis explains that a nostalgic past is one that is "…imbued with special qualities which

acquires its significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives" (1977, 418). It is a sentiment that requires a comparison between *then* and *now*, the latter carrying a sense of "...beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love, etc." (Davis 1977, 418), that is somehow absent in the present time. Nostalgia is worthy of study in folkloristics because of how it informs us about what aspects of the past have contributed to who a person is, or what a community is like, in the present day. It can also inform us about what particular individuals might value, how they choose to express themselves, and what they want for the future. It is a sentiment tied up in the past, present *and* the future. Bronner too, addresses the important relationship that we have with the past by positing that in the study of folklore, we don't study the past exactly, but we study a present time that has been informed by the past (1985, 2).

Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) elaborates on the connection we have to the past by demonstrating an the intrinsic link that exists between home and nostalgic sentiment:

> To feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia (2001, 251).

Nostalgia hits us when we realize that we do not feel at home anymore. Suddenly we find ourselves reflecting on a time when we did. Since nostalgia is connected to our sense of "home," it is not surprising that an individual might engage in a form of silent nostalgia, especially if that home, or that community, has gone through drastic changes. Given such factors as the modernization of the GNP, the collapse of the fishery, and changes to

services, accessibility, and social organization, people in this region are well acquainted with the realities of change. Familiar sights and objects – fishermen mending their nets, killicks on the beach, oil lamps glowing on the table—are images that operate to remind a person of home, especially if that home does not exist anymore.

Joyce is a quilter who feels the need to incorporate a great deal of nostalgic imagery into her work, even though she finds it difficult to talk about the symbols in those terms. She walked me through the images on her quilt, but did not have very much to say about her personal nostalgic sentiments. In the following conversation, you can see that she has memories of oil lamps and outhouses, but does not feel the need to verbalize any specific memories or personal stories:

> *Joyce*: This is the outhouse now. The only two quilts I didn't add that outhouse on, is that two that I'm doing now. I had it on every other quilt.
> *Lisa*: It is supposed to be reminiscent of the past?
> *Joyce*: Yes. Right. This is the lamp, I does he a lot.
> *Lisa*: Did you ever have an outhouse on this property?
> Joyce: No, not here. When we came here, the power was through.

She then lists a number of other symbols she likes to put on her quilts. In the meantime, I'm left with more questions: So when did you have an outhouse? Why do you always feel the need to put them on your quilts? Joyce did not provide any answers because for her, it is enough that she can express her nostalgia in this silent form. It could be that the outhouse simply reminds her of growing up—when times were simpler, when she was a child living at home. For nostalgic people such as Joyce, gaps between present day and that feeling of home can cause a "…defamiliarization and sense of distance [that] drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future" (Boym 2001, 50). So to tell her story, Joyce sifts through a Tupperware bin full of patterns, and selects symbols for her quilts. In doing so, she closes the gap between past

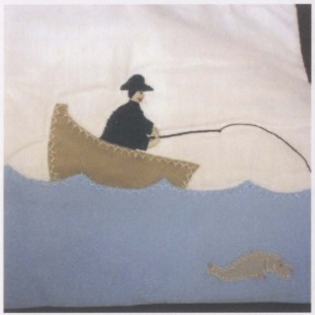
and present, creating an object that can live on into the future. This is typical of most quilters I met, despite the fact that each has their own set of symbols and methods of embossing them. Odette Burke of Flower's Cove is someone who treats her nostalgic sentiment quite differently. To tell her story, she enlists her husband Pius to make colorful drawings based on the familiar canon of symbols. Together they gravitate towards collaborative quilts as their story-telling medium—a silent but meaningful mode of expression that represents both of their pasts. Perhaps because she does not do the actual drawings, she was more verbally expressive about her nostalgia. When showing me an image of children jumping from one pan of ice to another, she exclaimed, "We used to do this. This was a winter activity I really enjoyed." With grown children herself now, this kind of activity is far away from her present reality. Making memory objects, such as these quilts, is an act that helps Odette to address "continuities and discontinuities" in her sense of self, meanwhile helping to insure "… a modicum of order and stability during the process of change" (Davis 1977, 419).

The Fishery

Not only is the collapse of the fishery one of the possible motivating circumstances for GNP quilters to reaffirm and proliferate a particular sense of identity, many different symbols associated with the fishery appear on most, if not all quilts (see figs. 33, 34, 35). While subtle for the most part, and not overly sentimental in execution, there is a series of circulated and accepted images that quilters may select to put on their quilts, as a quiet way to pay homage to this failed industry—which, upon disappearing, took a great deal relics, behaviors, roles, customs, and traditions along with it. Now, instead of seeing men on the docks mending their nets, one can quilt an icon of a fisherman in a net-mending

pose. Or, a quilter can include an image of two figures carrying away stacks of dried cod. While waterfront flakes have long-since ceased to be, the image of people placing cod onto them, or simply just the fish in its split open triangulation, have lingered in the memories of the quilters, and have become something they feel the need to put down on fabric. The fact that they can quilt these images, even though they are no longer a part of everyday life, may give the quilters a sense of empowerment and continuity in the face of extraordinary change. The act of recreating these images helps to acknowledge this past, before it completely slips away, meanwhile demonstrating that they can still carry forward traditions. Despite changing times, quilters continue to tell the narrative of their personal and shared observations and experiences, even if they do not have the specific words to express them.

Fig. 33 – Net Mending Block by Marie Reid




Left: Fig. 34 – Fishing Block by Naomi Wilcox
Right: Fig. 35 – Dried Cod Block by Joyce Young

Henry Glassie, in his article "On Identity," a response to Elliott Oring's positions on identity, brings up an interesting point about why some cultures may have a stronger need to put forward a sense of shared identity. Referencing different places where he has engaged in research, he concludes: "Turkish artists are like Native American and Irish artists in humanity. They differ in circumstance. The more tense the circumstance, the more likely identity is to rise into articulation" (1994, 239). This is pertinent not because of the Irish heritage of the majority of the quilters, but instead, for the many ways this region, and Newfoundland in general, has been bogged down in "circumstance." Although a range of such circumstances were touched on during interviews, such as geographic isolation (and related difficulties, including the lack of services), government resettlement initiatives, economic strife, and physical disability, it is perhaps the collapse of the fishery that had the most dramatic and lasting effect on the lives of those living on the GNP. As previously argued, I believe that this particular circumstance has played a

leading role in why people began making the quilts, and what images have been included in the canon. Given this tremendous upheaval, impacting not only the economy but also the population and cultural practices of coastal communities, people were suddenly eager to find ways to celebrate and express an identity that was slipping to the wayside. Now that it has all come to pass, the quilts indeed celebrate that sense of identity, but with an ever-pressing nostalgic sentiment lying at its core.

Christmas Mummering

Mummering is a festive tradition in Newfoundland that happens during the twelve days of Christmas. It generally involves members of a community dressing up in disguises and then visiting neighbours to perform skits and play music (see figs. 36, 37). At one time, this tradition was prolific across Newfoundland, and was closely associated with Newfoundland culture. Over the past few decades, this tradition has gone into drastic decline, but despite this fact, mummering practices remain present in the memories of GNP residents. Many people took opportunities to bring reflect on mummering whenever I asked questions about community changes they have seen over the years. Melvin M. Firestone describes mummering practices on the GNP in his 1969 article "Mummers and Strangers in Northern Newfoundland." While his description is applicable to the entire GNP, he focuses his attention on the practices of west lying communities:

> Along the Straits of Belle Isle during the twelve days of Christmas, mummers, or 'janneys,' go from house to house adding to the merriment that characterizes this holiday. Although the spirit of these masked performers is overtly festive, there are covert implications to their behavior. By donning disguises they make themselves unknown and so escape their customary social roles. It removes some of the inhibitions normal to individuals in their daily lives, and as 'janneys' their behaviour becomes somewhat unpredictable and capricious (1969, 63).


Left: Fig. 36 – Christmas Mummering Block by Sharon Roberts
Right: Fig. 37 – Christmas Mummering Block by Odette and Pius Burke

Considering the decline in this practice, which seemingly began its departure in post-moratorium years, it is no surprise that women find occasion to pay tribute to this tradition on the quilt top. Depictions of mummers are common, appearing on the vast majority of quilts. The imagery attempts to capture the strange attire worn by mummers, and the performances they would enact during Christmas time visits (see figs. 36, 37). Using the small confines of the quilt block, quilters draw or appliqué janney figures in their disguises, hopping about or walking from house to house. In most cases, they really do reflect the mummers described by Firestone:

> People wrap themselves in quilts, drape themselves in tablecloths, and put on odd garments. Sometimes only a sheet is hung around the body. Shapes are often changed by tying pillows over stomachs to represent fatness or by making humps on the back with stuffings of various kinds (1969,65).

Even though none of my informants admitted taking on the role of janney in the past, many of them described playing host to these door-to-door visitors during the twelve days of Christmas. They spoke of how this tradition brought joy into their lives, despite the potential for mummers to wreak havoc. Two different women that I interviewed in

Conche outwardly lamented the decline in this practice. They missed the way people would go door to door behaving foolishly, stomping around indoors with their boots on, and they especially missed the social cohesion that accompanied the tradition. Gertrude Hunt said to me, "At one time, at Christmas time you could go to anybody's house. You could mummer up and you could go in anywhere. Now, you can't do that anymore. You don't go in no one's house here now, unless you're invited." What was once accepted and expected is now rare, alive in memory alone, or as nostalgic imprints on quilt tops. From what I have been told, many people miss the way things were "back then"—back when people visited each other, helped each other, and communities felt more like families. In a sense, the shift away from mumming practices is symbolic of a larger social and cultural shift that has reverberated across the GNP, leaving no community untouched.

Berry Picking

Bakeapples are a locally foraged, orange colored berry that grows in localized areas of the GNP. The bakeapple symbol appears on most quilts and is fairly consistent in how it appears, but has variance to the size and number of berries shown. Some women choose to detail a few berries, while others will show a cluster of them (see figs. 38, 39). In the book *Rough Food* (1994), John T. Omohundro's study of Northern Peninsula foodways, there is an eloquent description of the bakeapple. It is a description that elevates this particular berry to an irrefutable status among the local berries. He states, "The bakeapple, an amber-colored relative of the raspberry, ripens in mid-August. Main Brookers pick large quantities of many kinds of berries, but few berries stir them to such action and poetry as the bakeapple" (1994, 164). He then provides information about the foraging grounds of different communities, alongside their storing. cooking, and

consumption practices (1994, 164-65). In all this, he stresses the almost universal respect for this regional fruit. I too, noticed a reverence for bakeapples. Every time I was served a slice of bakeapple pie, I was asked: "You've eaten bakeapple, right?" When I answered in the affirmative, I was usually met with a nod of approval.

Left: Fig. 38 – Bakeapple Block by Inga Coombs
Right: Fig. 39 – Bakeapple Block by Joyce Young

Not just bakeapples, but a variety of different locally foraged berries constitute an important part of local foodways on the GNP. Berries picked in the late summer and fall can last through the whole winter when frozen. Most families I visited had a stockpile of one or more berry types in their freezers. These same families offered me a slice of fresh pie made from different local berries. According to Omohundro, the most commonly picked berries on the Northern Peninsula include bakeapples, squashberries, marshberries, raspberries, blueberries, and partridgeberries (1994, 164-165). The act of picking the berries is an activity that many residents enjoy almost as much as eating the berries themselves. Pointing to a block on her quilt Marie said, "Berry picking. I got a mind that's partridgeberries. That's what I said when I looked at it I says, 'Looks like

they're partridgeberry picking, all of them's partridgeberries in there' (see fig. 40)." She said this with a great smile on her face. Her drawing is one that has seared itself into my memory. It shows a woman kneeling and picking berries, with an inherent peaceful quality to the scene. Marie's depiction makes it look like a serene activity, but not all quilters will take the time to create such an idyllic context for their berries. Most quilters will just use the regular bakeapple pattern.

Fig. 40 – Berry Picking Block by Marie Reid

To be expected, I found that some quilters closely associated berries with the natural landscape. Naomi Wilcox, during a proclamation of regional pride, moves into a proclamation of love for berries and berry picking:

> I don't want to leave. I spent all those years here, I'm not going to leave now! You got your freedom, you go where you like, come when you like. And I was just waiting for the raspberries to ripen, and the bakeapples. We go at that.

The sense of freedom she gets comes from being able to wander around the natural landscape, and when in season, pick raspberries and bakeapples at will, is part of why she loves living in this region.

I began to wonder, does everyone like bakeapples here? I was surprised to learn that there is almost a unanimous love, but not quite.

> *Lisa*: What's this one?
> *Joyce*: Bakeapple.
> *Lisa:* Do you pick bakeapples?
> *Joyce*: No, I don't pick, I don't like bakeapples.
> *Lisa:* I thought you had to like them, because you're from here.
> *Joyce*: No, no! I never goes picks *them*. My husband likes them, he sometimes goes picks them.

Despite this, even people who do not like bakeapples find themselves driven to replicate the bakeapple icon over and over on their quilts. Joyce does not like bakeapples, and doesn't pick them, but her husband does and so do most of her neighbours. So, perhaps paying tribute to a long-standing tradition of bakeapple picking in her community, these berries end up on most of her quilts, even if they do not end up in her freezer come September.

Moose Hunting

Perhaps the most iconic symbol on the quilt is that of the moose. It is a symbol that undergoes little alteration as most people choose to use the original pattern, derived from a coloring book. In the image, the moose stands in a boggy landscape, with low trees behind him, and water dripping from its mouth (see figs. 41, 42). It is easily the most familiar icon, which is not surprising considering the presence of moose in Newfoundland. On the Northern Peninsula they make their presence known in early morning or at twilight, when they wander into yards, or graze for food along the side of

the road. They are also notorious for walking in front of cars, causing close calls and sometimes even, moose related car accidents (Omohundro 1994, 202). These are unpleasant run-ins, but very common. Everyone has personal story of this kind, and so as a visitor, I was told on a near daily basis, "Watch for moose!" Indeed, during the forty-five minute evening drive from Main Brook to Conche, I was sure to see four or more moose. For this reason, people tend to drive slower than the speed limit, especially during moose-grazing hours, to help prevent accidents.

Left: Fig. 41 – Moose Block by Marie Reid
Right: Fig. 42 – Moose Block by Millie Carnell

Obviously, people do not like encountering moose on the roads, but people do not dislike moose either. Though the sentiment is far from universal, I met several people who have a reverence and respect for this animal. People often expressed wonderment when moose enter their yards, and seem to like that they share their natural environment. Even more important, is the fact that moose are a part of GNP foodways, and have been since the mid-1940s, when hunters turned their attentions to them as a food source (Omohundro 1994, 201). With a proper license, moose are hunted just before rutting

season, each October, just as the moose flesh begins to take on a strong flavour (1994, 203). Omohundro provides information about community hunting practices on the GNP, offering a description of what happens after a moose has been hunted. He explains that once the meat has been butchered, it is distributed among members of a hunting party, partnership, and shared with particular community members (1994, 204). It is then ready to be used as a food source:

> The bulk of meat is frozen, and several dozen quarts will be bottled. In the fall when the town is in the throes of moose fever, moose is eaten perhaps twice a week, then during the winter it is eaten about once a week. Fried moose steaks are popular for boil-ups in the woods during spring ice fishing season (1994, 205).

Many of the women I interviewed had husbands who went on yearly hunting trips for moose. Their hunting skills had been taught to them by their fathers as boys, and then practiced throughout their lives. It is a traditional activity that carries a great deal of personal meaning to those who practice it. It is not only important in terms of food acquisition, but as a part of regional and cultural identity. When I asked Oliver if he considered himself a hunter, he said, "Yes, I hunt whatever there is to get to eat. Moose, caribou, rabbits, partridges, fish." He then showed me one of his "memory rocks" that he picked up during an especially memorable moose-hunting trip (see fig. 43). In reference to his memory rock, Oliver says the following:

> *Oliver*: This is one I got, in fact, this was a moose hunting trip, and I went picked up this. 1977. Souvenir of Great Cat Arm, in White Bay. That's one I got by the river.
> *Lisa*: So you took the rock as a keepsake of that trip?
> *Oliver:* Yes, that's officially 1977. That's thirty-three years. Now if I didn't have that marked. I wouldn't have ever remembered that. There's a few more trips I made after the first one, see, I marked that on there too, November 2nd '87, and 11 November in '88.
> *Lisa*: Such a good idea for keeping track of your different trips.
> *Oliver*: Yes!

For Oliver it is not the food he acquired on these trips that he remembers, but the actual trips themselves. These memories, aided by his "souvenirs," give him great pleasure. He wants to remember these hunting trips because they are important part of his life story. Oliver's collection of memory rocks demonstrates the importance of moose hunting in his life, also reflected in the moose that his wife Marie painted onto her quilt blocks.

Fig. 43 – Oliver Reid's Memory Rock

Sealing

Sealing practices turn up on quilts as either a seal sitting on an ice pan, or as a sealer dragging a fresh seal carcass behind him. At the time of my visit, Joyce and Lloyd had just finished bottling up fifty-six bottles of seal. They were hoping that this meat would help see them through the year. Sealing, like other forms of hunting, is a traditional practice that has helped communities sustain themselves through the seasons. Not very

many women will choose to depict a sealer—Joyce may be one of the few—but the lone seal image is quite common (see figs. 44, 45). Seals have a deserving place on the quilts as they have served as a natural resource on the peninsula for more than two centuries (Omohundro 1994, 254). Historically, and to a lesser degree in present times, seals were not just used as a food source, but also for their hides. Keeping in mind that he was writing in 1967, Melvin Firestone explains the role of seals, sealskins, and the act of seal hunting on the GNP:

> I estimate that at least half of the meat eaten is game. Aside from the birds, rabbits and other animals taken for this purpose, seals are hunted in the spring for food, but primarily for their hides. In the past these were made into boots and other garments, but now the high price paid for skins makes sale the prime motive. To obtain the pelts the men walk out onto the moving ice of the Strait, which travels with the current, six miles up and six down, a dangerous venture requiring stamina and skill (1967, 89).

Aside from Joyce, very few people offered information about seals in terms of their identity as a food source. Oliver, when talking about moose hunting, also mentioned that he has hunted seals in the past. He had visual proof of this practice that he once engaged in. On display in their house, is a white taxidermy seal sitting on a rounded chunk of Styrofoam like an ice pan beneath it (see fig. 46). According to Oliver, he hunted this seal around twenty-three years ago and immediately decided to have it stuffed. It now exists as a both a memory object and symbol of regional pride. Oliver mentioned that he no longer hunts seals for food, taxidermy or otherwise. He now focuses on moose hunting, or setting snares for rabbits. While he did not explain why he has stopped this hunting practice, it could be that it has gone into decline in recent years, all over the peninsula. While his wife Marie did not choose to put a seal or a sealer on her quilt top, she did, however, choose to paint a pair of sealskin boots.


Left: Fig. 44 – Sealing Pattern by Joyce Young
Right: Fig. 45 – Seal Block by Odette and Pius Burke

Fig. 46 – Oliver Reid's Hunting Trophies

Sealskin Boot Making

The common sealskin boot icon shows a tall pair of boots with a series of delicate pleats across the toes. Referencing research conducted by Bock (1992) and Firestone (1992), Omohundro explains that this knee-high skin boot, predominant along the straits, was borrowed from Labrador Inuit material culture and became a regional specialty to make and wear (1994, 259). Likely due to the proximity of the Strait of Belle Isle to Labrador, the boot making tradition is predominant in the straits area, but it is a recognizable tradition across the peninsula. The quilt icon is representational of what the boot is supposed to look like, despite the fact that modern takes on these handmade boots forgo the pleats. A less frequent quilt image shows women in the process of tanning a skin— a now-rare sight along the straits. In fact, the sealskin book making tradition has been facing obsolescence all over the GNP since the 1960s, when accessibility to rubber boots forced them into decline (Omohundro 1994, 259). In present day most people do not own a pair of skin boots, and if they do, the boots are rarely worn, instead kept safely in storage, often in the deep freeze where the skin is thought to stay fresh.

Due to their lack of daily use, these handmade boots have long since been objects of nostalgia rather than function. Aside from Rita, I only met two other craftspeople that carry the skills and knowledge to make sealskin products. Of these three people, only one actively makes boots, and this person only makes them for family members, despite a surge of interest in her work. Unfortunately, she has not passed her skills onto anyone else in the family, possibly because she never had a daughter, only sons. There is a feeling, which she expressed, that the sealskin tradition is in danger of disappearance. That being said, the sealskin boot quilt pattern, likely derived from a coloring book,

appears on a majority of quilts. Even though the practical usage as boots has diminished, the memories of family members making and wearing them are not yet lost. Pointing at a pair that she painted on the picket-edged quilt spread out before us, Inga said, "Them skin boots, my mother used to make them." When I asked if she had learned how to make boots, she said "No, not nere one of us," referring to her family of nine siblings. Inga's mother Minnie Mitchelmore died in 1998, taking the sealskin tradition with her (see fig. 47, 48). Even though she does not make boots herself, Inga values sealskin craft, and celebrates it on her quilt tops (see fig. 49).

Slippers and mittens are two other sealskin objects that were once widely made and used. These were also once essential items that have been replaced by manufactured goods. Some of these objects are now recreated by craftspeople in a miniature form as ornaments to dangle from car mirrors, as key chains, or for display in the house. They are usually exact replicas of the larger, functional objects, but can easily fit in the palm of the hand. Although the boots and these other sealskin products have faced disuse, people have found ways to keep them immediate, as memory-makers. Inga said of her mother: "She used to make the little tiny ones too." Whether visiting homes in the straits or other locations on the GNP, it was very common to see these tiny replicas in display cases or hanging on the wall in people's homes (see fig. 50). Susan Stewart would say that such recreations are "...a projection of the world of everyday life; this real world is miniaturized or giganticized in such as way as to test the relation between materiality and meaning" (1984, 57). What is the meaning, then, that such miniature boots and mittens are putting forward? Do they have a similar function and meaning as the sealskin boot quilt icon? Could it be that sealskin products and their modern recreations have become,

as Omohundro suggests, a "…badge of ethnicity in northern Newfoundland..." emblematic of "…the distinctive style of life in the north" (1994, 259).

Left: Fig. 47 – Sealskin Boots Belonging to Inga Coombs
Right: Fig. 48 – Sealskin Tanning Block by Rita Parrill

Even though it is a practice in decline, Inga optimistically assures me that they are still being made along the straits:

> *Lisa*: So do you think this tradition of making the sealskin…
> *Inga*: Oh they still does them over on the straits.
> *Lisa*: It is just around here that maybe it has died down a bit more, but it is still going on there?
> *Inga*: Yes, over on the straits. I mean, the only one I know who done 'em here was Mom. But that's where she come from, over on that side. She come from Green Island Brook.

As if expecting my question about whether or not they are an endangered practice, Inga intercepts me to stress that these boots are still being made. She is correct, to a degree, but from what I have noticed during my fieldwork, those who can make the traditional pleated type are increasingly few and far between. It was often suggested to me, particularly while visiting homes in the straits, that the future of this tradition is tenuous, if not dire.

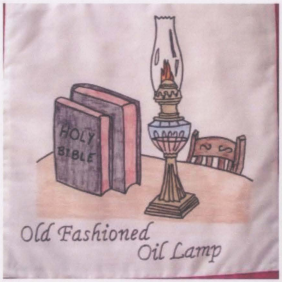

Left Fig. 49 – Sealskin Boot Block by Inga Coombs
Right: Fig. 50 – Sealskin Boot Ornament in the Skin Boot Church in Flower's Cove

Oil Lamps

The oil lamp icon consists of a glowing lamp, commonly depicted with a "Holy Bible" sitting next to. It is unclear why these two objects appear together—perhaps this image was taken from a printed source, such as the same coloring book that the "bull moose" icon was taken from—but they are almost always together on quilts. Sometimes there will also be a descriptive statement written across the quilt block above the lamp, such as "Old Fashioned Oil Lamp" or "How Cheerful Was the Glow from the Lamp" (see figs. 51, 52). Overall, the symbol attempts to capture the historic role of the lamp in the household, and any associations that people have with this tool. Considering the fact that electricity came to the Northern Peninsula later than other parts of Newfoundland, the oil lamp is not long forgotten—many of the quilters remember sitting with their families around the oil lamp. One of the most evocative anecdotes about the use of oil lamps came from Rita Parrill. She pointed to the lamp that she had carefully drawn onto her quilt block and explained why she chose to put it on her quilt. She said that she had clear

memories of being a child, sitting at the table with her family, and doing her homework by the light of the oil lamp. For Rita, the oil lamp represented a time when her family was together and in her memory, these were times of happiness. Whether it was winter or summer, they had light, warmth, shelter, and each other. The richness of the image she described left its mark on me, and I could see that she put the oil lamp on her quilt with obvious nostalgia, for memory making, and all the connected meanings.

Firestone explains some of the duties that women had along the straits and how they were depended on lamp light: "They make many of the clothes and knit sweaters and stockings, but in the past they carded, spun and made almost all the clothes and worked hours into the night by the light of small oil lamps making seal skin boots for the family use and for sale" (Firestone 1967, 90). This description really brings together different household activities, including textiles traditions, as they are all situated under the light of the lamp. The imagery provided by Firestone is reminiscent of Rita—someone who once made sealskin crafts, who no doubt at an earlier point in her life, sat near the oil lamp to make boots and slippers for her family.



Left: Fig. 51 – Oil Lamp Block by Rita Parrill
Right: Fig. 52 – Oil Lamp Block by Millie Carnell

Dog Teams

The dog team symbol is one that clearly resonates with some of the older craftspeople I visited. These GNP residents can still remember the "good old days" when their sled dogs were part of the family. The common dog team imagery shows a line of husky dogs pulling a sled across a landscape of snow. It is not a ubiquitous image like some of the others, especially considering it only appears on painted or crayon quilts, yet it still holds an important place in the canon. Before the roads were built, and before snowmobiles and other automobiles were introduced to the peninsula, the dog team was the most common method of winter transport on the GNP (see figs. 53, 54). Firestone points out not only the necessity of the dog team, but the skills that were needed to drive it: "When dogs were the only source of winter transportation each man was also a carter and needed the handling skills required for driving these animals" (1967, 89). Omohundro meanwhile provides information about the origin and use of the dog team. He explains that the "cultural complex" of the dogsled was adapted by observing the Labrador Inuit, and that these teams were vital for winter transportation. Only when snowmobiles replaced them in the 1960s, did they begin to fade in the cultural landscape (1994, 238). Before they disappeared, these dogs pulled a low wooden komatik (sled) and just as the Inuit would, "…drivers used a harness of separate traces so that each dog could pull in its own fashion" (1994, 238). Omohundro then goes on to provide some examples of how the dog teams were used: "Dogs were Main Brook's lifeline if someone fell ill in winter. They hauled fodder and firewood through the winter and manure in early spring. Dogs were also invaluable in running down and hauling large game like moose and caribou" (Omohundro 1994, 238). It is true that during my interviews, a few different families told

me stories about sending a sick or injured family member on dogsled to the hospital in St. Anthony. These stories of desperation had varying outcomes, some extraordinarily tragic. Memories of such moments tend to etch themselves in people's minds. However, not all memories are connected to life pain and difficulty. Laura Chambers, a ninety-four-year-old resident of Flower's Cove, reflected on the past ways of life with fondness, her memories of the dog team no exception. Here she briefly speaks of keeping dogs, and their necessary place in the family:

> *Lisa:* Did you keep dogs then? You kept dogs at the house?
> *Laura:* Oh yes.
> *Lisa*: How many?
> L*aura*: We used to have many dogs—a little team of dogs, 7 or 8 dogs.
> *Lisa:* Did they live outside?
> *Laura:* Who, the dogs? Oh they had to. They had a place made for them. We brought them there to feed 'em and that. Most of the time I would cook stuff for them.

She then went on to tell a story about how as a young lady, she would attend in neighboring communities along the straits. If a dance happened during the winter, the girls in her community would have to travel there by dogsled, even if they were wearing fancy dresses. This memory amused her, as she told it to through moments of laughter. It was at one of these dances that she met her husband-to-be. For Laura, the very notion of the dog team rouses different kinds of memories—some rooted in the mundane, and others connected to major crossroads in her life. Laura no longer makes quilts, because as an elderly individual, they are too demanding for her to make. She does, however, knit traditional socks and mittens that likewise, are simple reminders of a long-gone way of life.


Left: Fig. 53 – Dog Team Block by Inga Coombs
Right: Fig. 54: Dog Team Block by Marie Reid

Snowmobiles

A snowmobile is a small vehicle for winter transportation consisting of a tread in the rear, and skis in the front (Firestone 1994, 21). These open, one or two passenger vehicles, are usually referred to as ski-doos, named for the first ever snowmobile model (1994, 21). Most families that I met on the GNP own at least one snowmobile for winter use. It is not surprising then, that they appear on many Newfoundland Quilts. However, it should be noted that the most common depiction is not a modern model, but an extinct one. This "old-fashioned snowmobile" is usually painted or drawn in blue crayon, standing atop a sheet of ice or layer of snow (see fig. 55). I had never seen a snowmobile like this until I visited the GNP, where I began spotting them abandoned on people's properties, in decay from decades of neglect. According to Omohundro, this snowmobile type, designed by Bombardier to carry twelve passengers, once had an important role in the region. He explains that in the 1950s, they were needed to ferry passengers and haul logs before the personal snowmobile model was introduced (1994, 237). This "snow-going vehicle" was

called a *snow bus* by Bombardier, but locally just known as the snowmobile (Firestone 1994, 21). It is believed that the snow bus was first put into widespread use in response to the fast disappearance of the dog sled (1994, 21). Though individual families usually owned these large, closed machines, entire communities would benefit from their presence. Some people could recall the days when the snowmobile would pick them up to gather supplies, haul wood, or visit nearby friends and family in neighbouring outports. When Omohundro was writing in 1994, he encountered men who were dedicated to preserving snow bus relics (1994, 237), but by the time I visited, I mostly encountered the occasional bluish rust-stained shell at the back of people's properties or on the roadside. I only ran into one machine that had been preserved (see fig. 56) Some people, who maybe see value in them as antique objects, attempt to protect them from the elements by throwing a sort of cover over them, but for the most part, the twelve-passenger snowmobiles only exist as metal refuse on the landscape.

Left: Fig. 55 – Snowbus Block by Inga Coombs
Right: Fig. 56 – Restored Bombardier Snowbus

The function of both the snow bus in the past, and the ski-doo in present times, spans practical, leisure, and social purposes. Rita in particular stressed the importance of the ski-doo in her daily life. Not only does her husband use their personal snowmobile to acquire winter wood for the fire, but it also helps them visit friends in the winter, and access their cabin, located far off the main roads. She stress that without one, they would be denied access to her favorite place for several months a year. In fact, much to her dismay, the winter before my interview, there hadn't been enough snow on the ground for them to make it over to their property. It was the first time she could recall this happening and expressed concern that this would occur again the following winter. Rita's quilt had a snow bus on its surface, and it was the first time of many that I would see this very icon.

Many quilters I met had something to say about snowmobiles, because like it or not, they are a part of everyday life in the winter on the Northern Peninsula. Laura Chambers did not have much to say for the ski-doo, as she still preferred the old way of travel: "the dog team and the coach box." Another quilter I met, Laurie Pearl from the straits, no longer uses snowmobiles due to her advanced age, but explained that she never liked them anyhow. The two she has on her property—a snowbus at the edge of the yard, and a ski-doo in the basement—have not been used in decades.

> *Laurie*: We got one up there, our old one.
> *Lisa*: That's your family's old one?
> Laurie: Yes. This is where my house was to. This is my old house.
> Lisa: Did you ever go ski-dooing?
> Laurie: Never liked ski-dooing, my dear. I got one down in the basement, one my husband had before he died. It is still there in the basement; I never cared too much for it.

The snowmobile that Laurie pointed to at the back of the yard, sat rusted from years of weather. Likewise, the ski-doo in her basement has been neglected, going untouched since her husband died twenty-nine years ago. Despite her apparent indifference, Laurie still felt the need to pay homage to snowmobiles in the form of a quilt (see fig. 57). This crayon quilt follows the album format, but instead of having various Newfoundland symbols, each block is an image of a snowmobile. It is a variation of the Newfoundland Quilt that is rare if not completely unique. Laurie has many different snowmobile modern brands and styles featured on her quilt, and is about as proud of this quilt as she is her Newfoundland ones. Did she make this quilt as a way to access memories of when she did ride snowmobiles? Is it part of a life-review process that brings to mind her husband? Laurie's quilt, alongside the antique snowmobile symbol, both operate to demonstrate the regional importance of this mode of transportation, and in the case of the later, to pay tribute to the hulking snowmobile long since abandoned.

Fig. 57 – Snowmobile Block by Laurie Pearl

The Other Icons

While doing this examination of Newfoundland Quilt icons, I was surprised to notice that no one attempted to include an image of deeply personal relevance. No family portraits appeared on quilts, no family pets, no first homes, no family heirlooms, and no personal possessions—nothing was ever taken directly from a quilter's personal sphere and put onto a quilt. All of the images I viewed were faithful to the nostalgic, regionalist, and iconic imagery that they are intended to have. I wondered why this might be the case, and whether or not the future of Newfoundland Quilts would see more idiosyncratic quilt types. While this remains to be seen, what we *do* know is that the Newfoundland Quilt has been powerful enough to inspire a few different spin-off variations. In the three spin-off types I encountered, there appeared to be a trend towards personalization. The Graduation, Wedding, and Religious Quilts all stay true to the Newfoundland Quilt in that they all tend to borrow from an established canon of patterns, but they can also diverge from the tradition through the addition of very specific and personal references.

VI

Spin-Off Quilts

Even newer than the Newfoundland Quilt itself, are the quilt types that are inspired by the same design. These spin-off quilts, as I have termed them, come into the collective memory of the Northern Peninsula quilters as recently as the past ten years, although no one could say for sure. Three of the more dominant spin-offs include the Wedding Quilt, the Graduation Quilt, and the Religious Quilt. Each is made in the familiar Baltimore album design. Many quilters who make these quilts recognize that they are based on the Newfoundland Quilt, but are made more deliberately to mark special occasions, or in the case of the Religious Quilt, a particular set of beliefs. For the Wedding and Graduation Quilts, the iconography varies greatly as the symbols are chosen to be meaningful to the person who receives the quilt as gift. While there are certainly icon patterns that are more readily accepted, there is more creative leeway for these quilts than for the Newfoundland Quilt. There is no established canon of patterns to work from, although there is a shared general idea of what should go on the quilt. Expectedly, these quilts can be in one of these three styles—appliqué, painted, and embroidered. In most cases, the Graduation and Wedding Quilts I viewed were made by a grandmother, for her grandson or granddaughter. Other times, the quilts were made on a commission basis for a non-quilter who wants to give a family member a gift to mark the special occasion. These quilt types, which can be considered "celebration" or "rites of passage" quilts, are keepsakes that are never intended to be used as bed coverings (Gustafson 2002, 204). They are made to symbolize the movement of an individual (or a couple) from one life-stage into the next. These important moments in life are noted by friends and family, and celebrated in

several different ways, but nowadays, it is becoming increasingly popular for Northern Peninsula quilters to prepare for these occasions by making quilts. Why are rites of passage important? What drives people to mark these events through craft? We can get closer to finding answers to such questions by looking to what Mary Hufford has suggested about the important role of rites of passage in family life. She states,

> Rites of passage are grounded in the life cycle, and bring together family and community members bound by their sense of a common history, identity, and destiny. It is in such settings that the interrelations of traditional culture and the life cycle may be expressed in heightened ways, as people learn or review their shared history, mythology, stories, and customs. Thus ways of getting through the life cycle become tightly intertwined with our notions of who we are (1984, 18).

This eloquent description describes how family and community look to rites of passage as a way to express shared notions of "history, mythology, stories, and customs." They become moments that bring people together to celebrate not only the different stages of life that many go through, but also the shared sense of identity that a group of might people carry. Lorre M. Weidlich, in her study, "The Sunday Friends: The Group and Their Quilts" (1997) noted the importance of gift giving during specific rites of passage that a member of a quilting group would enter. Within this group, based in Austin, Texas, Weidlich observed the following:

> A wedding or the birth of a baby to a member led to significant changes in her life. Group gifts to these members were directly related to their life changes: for the expectant mother, a baby quilt; for the newlywed, quilt blocks intended for a tablecloth. In both cases, then, the group gave its symbolic support to the member undergoing the rite of passage in the form of a gift designed to assist her in her changed status (1997, 73).

On the GNP, rites of passage quilts operate in much the same way. People are choosing quilts to help note the passing of time, to assist transitions to new life stages, and perhaps to help accomplish a strengthening of such shared identities. Although I do not provide a

section on baby quilts, it should be noted that I was shown multiple baby quilts, demonstrating the enduring significance of this gift-giving ritual that marks the start of a new life. One particular baby quilt I saw, modeled after the Newfoundland Quilt, not only marks this preliminary rite of passage, but it also prepares the baby for what will become its regional identity.

In the following sections, I aim to describe the three predominant spin-off quilts while providing some motivations and perspectives offered by quilters. Keep in mind, however, that most quilters do not speak directly on issues of identity nor their ideas on the importance of marking certain rites of passage.

Graduation Quilts

When I was visiting Myrtle in Roddickton, the very first quilt that she showed me was a Graduation Quilt that she had made for her granddaughter about nine years ago. It is still in perfect condition, as it is in permanent storage, kept in a plastic bag in her granddaughter's closet. This quilt, which exhibits a series of iron-on photographs taken throughout her granddaughter's youth, is one of the first Graduation Quilts she ever made (see fig. 58). She now makes the Graduation Quilt differently, including not just photographs, but other images and symbols that are emblematic of granddaughter's school days. Myrtle talks about the Graduation Quilts that she makes in this passage:

> I've done, I'd say, a dozen graduation quilts, for all my granddaughters. I've done different ones than that one [pointing at a Graduation Quilt]—now I put their school in, I put whatever names of the ball team that was in the school, and their pictures – their kindergarten graduation picture and their grade twelve graduation picture. I put a scroll in, and the hat, and what else did we put in… the computer, with a picture of them on the computer.

This kind of celebration quilt is now a common gift for new high school graduates on the Northern Peninsula. It is meant to be a reflection on the past few years of the graduate's

life, with emblems that one day will remind of his or her of youth. The most familiar graduation quilt design type is reminiscent of the Newfoundland Quilt—each quilt block carries a complex of symbolic images, centering on the high school experience. The patterns used often include depictions of the school's mascot, sport teams, a picture of the school itself, and images of the graduation ritual such as the hat and scroll. After the quilt blocks are finished, fabrics in the school's emblematic colors are often used to border and decorate the quilts.

Left: Fig. 58 – Graduation Quilt by Myrtle Lewis
Right: Fig. 59 – Graduation Quilt by Marie Reid

Marie Reid also had a Graduation Quilt to show me, but hers was only partially complete, still held firmly on her hand-quilting frame (see fig. 59). From what I could see, this quilt fits the predominant mould perfectly. Here she discusses the Graduation Quilts she makes for her grandchildren:

> Now, they all did get a graduation quilt. There's nine of them, nine grandchildren, and there's eight of them graduated. That's the eighth one (pointing to a graduation quilt). They all got their graduation quilt. They are most all the same except for the first three. I didn't have all the patterns so I just done the hat and the scroll and I put the student's name in. But I also got the pictures of them.

Although the majority of Graduation Quilts that I saw adhere to this design model, I did encounter a few very unique examples. In fact, that first quilt that Myrtle showed me was very different from any others I saw during my fieldwork. This photo-transfer quilt was made using photos from each year of school. After the photos were collected, they were transferred onto the fabric blocks, and then connected and bordered with paisley fabric. When Myrtle first showed me that quilt, I remarked that I had never seen a quilt like it before and then asked: "So, is this your version of the graduation quilt?" She responded, "Yes, that's *mine* now. Everybody else has a different version of it. Well, I just done mine, *my* way." It seemed important for her to emphasize that this particular style was one that she came up with herself. It is a source of pride for her that she had come up with a unique style of quilt for her granddaughter. She even had an aesthetic response to her work as she exclaimed out loud, "Beautiful, isn't it?" I asked Myrtle if her granddaughter appreciated the gift and she remarked "Oh she was really, really excited." After speaking with Myrtle I surmised that this rite of passage quilt might operate to bring two generations—grandchild and grandmother—closer together.

Another unique graduation quilt that I saw was one made by Isabel Pilgrim who lives in Main Brook. Her Graduation Quilts consist of numerous different animals images on each of the quilt blocks (see fig. 60, 61). All of these animals—from snakes to horses—are embroidered by hand, each block taking several days to complete. It is an arduous process that she begins a full year before the graduation date. Isabel explained that while her quilts were mostly alike, using the same patterns over and over again, the quilts made for her female grandchildren had different animals than the quilts for her male grandchildren. This is the only variance in her work. Her Graduation Quilts are

never personalized or tailored to the individual, nor do they carry any emblems from the high school experience. On a whole however, they are symbolic in terms of how the gift marks the graduation rite of passage. Each of her grandchildren look forward to the day that they receive an embroidered quilt from their grandmother.


Left: Fig. 60 – Graduation Quilt by Isabel Pilgrim
Right: Fig. 61 – Detail of Icon on Graduation Quilt by Isabel Pilgrim

Wedding Quilts

According to the accounts of the quilters, wedding quilts predate the Newfoundland Quilt, but have drastically changed since its proliferation. In the past, they were usually pieced quilts, stemming from traditional styles such as the Double Wedding Ring pattern, but in recent years, Wedding Quilts have taken on the same album design as the Newfoundland Quilt. It is for this reason that I consider their recent incarnation a spin-off quilt type.

The Wedding Quilts I saw were made either as gifts for family members, or on a commission basis for someone who wanted to give such a gift. Like the other Northern Peninsula album quilts, the images can be painted, appliquéd or embroidered. The

Wedding Quilt is different from some of the other quilt types in the overall meaning it carries. Like the Graduation Quilt, it celebrates a rite of passage, but rather than meditating on the past, or prior life stages, Wedding Quilts focus on the upcoming wedding ritual, and the couple's future life together. Some of the quilt blocks are deeply personalized containing icons connected to the wedding itself. In fact, in all cases, the quilts are carefully tailored to the couple—their wedding colors are used throughout the quilt, their wedding invitations carefully replicated in appliqué or embroidery, and sometimes, there is an attempt to render the couple, whilst dancing, or in an embrace, in their wedding attire, onto the quilt (see fig. 62). Other blocks meanwhile, are more general in nature, containing recognizable symbols of love. For instance, I noted some reoccurring patterns, such as two interlocked wedding rings, that appeared on both embroidered and painted quilts (see fig. 63, 64). There were also symbols such as a bouquet of flowers, champagne glasses, and decorative hearts. When I talked to quilters about the wedding quilts they were making, they did not have very much to say about individual symbols. They *did* however provide other details, such as information about techniques and materials, gift giving dynamics, the need to personalize a quilt, consignment issues, as well as personal and/or communal aesthetic expectations. Next to some of my own observations, I will include some particularly telling conversations, to illuminate some of these attitudes and perspectives,

Naomi, who does a great deal of consignment quilting, explained that she prefers chain stitch embroidery for Wedding Quilts, but sometimes has to use paint instead. She explained, "I do the chain for the Wedding Quilt but if someone wants one in a hurry, I'll paint it. They only give me like a week, and I'll say, 'You should've given me more than

that if you want worked.' Worked or painted, they'll say which that they wanted, and that's what they get." Embroidered or 'worked' quilts take more time to make, but many quilters expressed a fondness for this style of Wedding Quilt. They are considered more "elegant" and therefore more suitable as wedding gifts. Having said that, because of the time needed to do embroidery, many quilters are choosing to focus on painted quilts, and for this reason, they are becoming the majority. The appliqué Wedding Quilts, on the other hand, were a noticeable minority. Despite this, I could still observe certain appliqué patterns being passed around and replicated. Even though appliqué quilts tend to be more creative in their pattern designs, I could still see how individual appliqué quilts were influencing by one another.

Fig. 62 – Wedding Quilt by Sharon Roberts

Left: Fig. 63 – Painted Wedding Block by Mamiellen Noseworthy
Right: Fig. 64 – Embroidered Wedding Block by Winnie Bussey

Gwen, who mostly makes appliqué style wedding quilts, offered an anecdote which addresses a possible downside of the high degree of personalization that goes into the Wedding Quilt, especially when doing appliqué or embroidery work:

> First when I started doing the wedding quilt, maybe might have been the third or fourth quilt that I did, I embroidered all those bride's girls and groom's boy names. I hand embroidered. So I did a quilt for a lady, for her daughter, so she came and picked up the quilt, and she was as happy as could be. A week or something, or a few days before the wedding, his [the groom's] dad died. So last week, or the week before last, she brought back her quilt, to see if I could fix it, because a lot of things wasn't right anymore. Because, his brother was standing for the wedding, and by the time they got married, he was gone out to sea. So he didn't stand for the wedding anymore and his name was on there. The date was wrong, the year was wrong. She was like "Do the best you can do." Actually, all they wanted me to do was put a piece of fabric right over the top of the names, and put the names on top of that. I tried it. It looked really bad. No, it is not going to work. So now I'm picking out the changes. So the blocks are all sewed in, and it is all quilted in. So I'm trying my best—I got it partly took out, and have the new blocks made, but I don't embroider it anymore, I buy the t-shirt fabric iron-on.

This segment of dialogue demonstrates the desire people have for Wedding Quilts to be personalized, with accurate information. For those who wish to give this quilt as a gift,

the quilt is closely aligned with the actual wedding ritual, where it is performed, and who the participants are. Around the time of my visit, Gwen had recently encountered a situation where some of her work had to be changed. She described the process of attempting to change certain details already embroidered onto the quilt blocks. It was frustrating for Gwen so she decided to stop using embroidery, and has even wondered whether or not it is worth it to make such detailed and precious quilts. Not only do her clients have high expectations, necessary materials, such as satin and beads, are not readily available, and are too costly. On top of this, she finds that she's not able to charge people for the *true* amount of time she puts into her work.

I had the opportunity to view many in-progress Wedding Quilts during my fieldwork. These quilts were being made as gifts for upcoming summer weddings. Most of the women I interviewed, who had made Newfoundland Quilts had also made at least one Wedding Quilt for a family member. In a few cases a quilter was commissioned to make one for a person they were not immediately connected to. The pervasiveness of this quilt type was clear and I wondered why it had gained such momentum in the region. Not only is it an important and symbolic process for the quilter who is making it, but the person getting married also tends to see it as a vital component of this rite of passage. In some cases the person getting married even sees importance in *who* makes the quilt for them. Gwen told me following: "Sharon's niece, someone else was going to do her a quilt, and she said, 'No, Aunt Sharon is doing me a quilt.'" Sharon's niece placed meaning in this gift-giving process to the extent that she wanted a say in where her quilt came from. Gwen spoke to me about how she watched the practice become a tradition:

> *Gwen:* It really took on. The first one I done was probably no more than 8 years ago.

> *Lisa:* And now it is its own tradition? It is part of the wedding tradition now.
> *Gwen:* Now all the younger ones are like "Mom I want a Wedding Quilt!" No matter what.

When Marie showed me a quilt that she was in the process of making for her granddaughter, I asked if all of the people in her family would get one. She said, "She's the first granddaughter, the first grandchild who's going to get married, none of our other grandchildren married yet, she's the first one." Even though this is the first Wedding Quilt that she had made, I got the impression that she intended to make one for each of them as they passed through this rite of passage. Marie's grandchildren, all 9 of them, would eventually receive two quilts from their grandmother. That is, as long as they each have the opportunity to graduate and to get married.

I asked a few quilters who make these spin-off quilts how widespread they believe the tradition to be. For the most part, people are under the impression that weddings quilts, at least in this style, are a "Newfoundland thing," possibly from the Northern Peninsula. Here, Myrtle and her daughter Debbie responded to my queries and discussed their beliefs on this topic:

> *Lisa*: What's your opinion? Do people outside of Newfoundland make the Wedding Quilt? I'm wondering because I never heard of this tradition before coming here.
> *Myrtle*: Not that I know of.
> *Lisa*: Do you think maybe it is a peninsula thing?
> *Debbie*: I think it is because my brother-in-law lives in Portland, Oregon, in the States, and they don't do nothing like that down there. So I made a few and gave to them, right?
> *Myrtle:* I've made a lot of Wedding Quilts.
> *Lisa*: The wedding quilt, is it down in St. John's too?
> *Myrtle*: I never ever seen it down there and I lived down there for twenty-one years. Wedding quilt.

It is for certainty that quilts are given as wedding gifts in other places in North America, but their styles vary widely depending on where they are made. The regional variant we

see on the Northern Peninsula is born from a trend in quilt making that centers on a consistent overall design. While there is variance in how this design is approached, it remains a recognizable part of what I'm beginning to consider the *Newfoundland Quilt effect,* which will be discussed below, on page 176.

Religious Quilts

A third spin-off quilt that I encountered is the Religious Quilt. I only saw a few examples of this variant, but they are still powerful reminders of why a person might choose to make a specific kind of quilt. These quilts are not meant to mark any specific rite of passage, nor are they made as gifts for friends and family. I do not even believe that they are made on a commission basis either—instead the Religious Quilt is made for the quilter herself, her husband, and the home they share. Unlike any other quilt I saw on the Northern Peninsula, these quilts are a very personal declaration of belief. They are a visual statement that might be shown to members of the church or to visitors like myself, but otherwise, are kept as keepsakes and private mementos of religiosity. I wondered why a person would be driven to making such an objects. I wondered if this kind of declaration is common among craftspeople, and what the object might mean to the person who makes it. According to Simon J. Bronner, such impulses are common within folk art traditions (1986, 207). He states, "Belief can … be communicated through objects. Material things can objectify ideas and feelings of fear, luck, or religious experience" (1986, 207). Religious people who practice craft may feel compelled to bring religious art out of the church and into their daily lives (Bird 1983, 89). The few women I met who make this quilt type were able to use the quilt top to put forward a range of religious feelings and experiences that they have had. Much like how a religious icon is carefully

placed on a nightstand, or a cross is nailed above a bed, the Religious Quilt may help to bring the emotional comforts of religious conviction out of the church, and into the home. Even the act of making the quilt could be a form of affirmation and meditation on these feelings, which are then held within the fabric of the quilt. Both the process and the outcome then resonate with the religiosity of the quilter, which she may consider an important part of her life.

In terms of the quilts themselves, of the two that I saw, one was painted using original hand-drawn patterns, and the other one, made by Marie Reid, was painted with iron-on patterns that she purchased (see fig. 65). While thematically similar, the symbols on the two quilts differ. Among Marie's icons is a pair of hands praying, a portrait of Mary with baby Jesus, Jesus on the cross, an image of the Holy Bible, and Jesus with the Lamb of God. None of Marie's quilt blocks were personalized, but I gathered from our conversation that each of the symbols had special meaning to her. Odette Burke's quilt, the one made with original patterns, was more personalized. She called it the Stations of the Cross Quilt and it consisted of a central image of the local Anglican Church surrounded by drawings of Jesus carrying the cross. Her quilt blocks, drawn and colored by her husband, mostly came from the story of Jesus' final walk (see fig. 66). According to Odette, he found little pictures of these scenes, and "…drawed them up to the big ones." The only regionally relevant block was his drawing of the Flower's Cove Skin Boot Church.[4] Odette pointed to this particular image with pride, demonstrating her

[4] The Sealskin Boot Church is a historic Anglican Church located in Flower's Cove, built under the guidance of Canon John T. Richards. According to Laura Chambers, funding to build this church was generated through the sale of locally made sealskin boots. The church basement was set up as a workshop and women from the community, including Laura's mother, would gather to sew the sealskin. Each pair of boots was sold for as little

admiration this place of worship: "That's the Anglican Church up there, the Skin Boot Church." She later told me that she does not attend this church, which surprised me, but I could see its importance to her considering it is iconic identity in the community.

Left: Fig. 65 – Religious Quilt by Marie Reid
Right: Fig. 66 – Religious Quilt by Odette and Pius Burke

Aside from when she was showing me the quilt, Odette did not offer any insight into the importance of religion in her life. She mentioned that she does attend church, but did not elaborate on this fact. Marie Reid, on the other hand, who got the idea to make a religious quilt from a catalogue of fabric patterns, found occasion to explain the role that religion has played in her life. Although her quilt is from store-bought patterns, I could see how Marie put her own style into how they were rendered, and so her work had a feeling of originality. Her quilt, next to anecdotes she offered from her life, informed me of the vitality of this particular aspect of her identity. Despite this, her reverence is not something that she discussed in the open. It was not until after her husband left the house, that she was able to be more expressive about how some of her life experiences were

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as one dollar. No specific dates were provided, but Laura guessed that the Skin Boot Church was built around 1916, the same year she was born.

connected to her religiosity. I was able to see this connection myself, as she guided me through a story of personal strife. After showing me the patterns that she used for her Religious Quilt, Marie began to talk to me about how her belief in God and the act of prayer assisted her through a very difficult period in her life. The story she told was personal and upsetting, but it helped me to understand why she chose to make a religious quilt. Prayer is something that saved her from a difficult experience; religion is a vital dimension of life. The quilt she made is an expression that might help her to process her life story, heal a wound, and pay tribute to a belief system that she accredits to having saved her life.

The Newfoundland Quilt Effect

The spin-off quilts demonstrate the overall impact of the Newfoundland Quilt, and how it has inspired new quilt designs and types to emerge. This *Newfoundland Quilt effect* suggests that new quilts types, based on the same premise, will continue to show up in GNP communities. As the Newfoundland Quilt maintains its popularity, so will any of the spin-offs that a quilter might choose to make or innovate. Also, by viewing the three spin-off quilts in this section, we can see what kinds of changes might be made to the Newfoundland Quilt type. Perhaps a GNP quilter who has made a Graduation Quilt for her grandson will then decide to use an image of him on her next Newfoundland Quilt. And if this happens, maybe it will inspire a whole new variety of Newfoundland Quilt. But sweeping changes such as these are only speculative because, for now, the Newfoundland Quilt has certain objectives in place that it apparently must abide by. Perhaps because of its steadfast nature, it maintains a certain power, and maybe it is for this reason that it is able to influence the creation of new quilt types in the first place.

Whether the Newfoundland Quilt changes or not, more and more women seem to be interested in making them. Even if they do not feel compelled to add personal images to their Newfoundland Quilts, they still gain from the process of quilting one in an utmost personal fashion.

VII

Quilts and Creative Motivations

Throughout the interviews with quilters, I could see that every individual had a different set of motivations for taking up this creative tradition. These different motivations interested me, but even more so when I could see that they tended to overlap and follow noticeable patterns. As much as each person's motives are different, they can be untangled and understood in similar ways. In his book *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (1985), Simon J. Bronner studied four wood carvers in Indiana hoping to understand the range of meanings that were being expressed through their craft practices. His study is relevant in how it demonstrates ways of identifying the personal motivations people might have behind their craft activities—he offers an understanding of *why* people might be driven to make objects. He also offers ideas about the hidden meanings these objects might hold—meanings that lie beneath the obvious or intended symbolism. We know that a Newfoundland Quilt carries symbols that represent feelings of nostalgic sentiment or regional pride, but what else do these quilts say? Do they carry any hidden meanings? And what circumstances lead a quilter to making quilts in the first place? In his study, Bronner closely observed the handcrafted objects that were shown to him, and then listened to the life stories that led each of his subjects to making crafts. In this two-fold approach he is able to decipher the sub-text of object making. In his book's introduction, he adeptly describes this sub-text in terms of the range of meanings that are held within the creative process:

> When people make things, they convey their hidden feelings, their grave concerns, and their cherished values. Objects are often the symbols that speak for us when words fail. The shapes our objects take, and how we build and use them,

> have meanings often outside awareness, yet crucial to our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us (1985, ix-x)

The creation of an object is a dynamic process that not only conveys a multi-faceted range of meanings, but also help a craftsperson cope with a number of different life difficulties. Ultimately, Bronner came to see how these men, in their advanced stages of life, were able to deal with significant social and cultural life changes through the act of chain carving. The chains themselves become an expression of their personal set of beliefs, attitudes and values (1985, 152). I may find that the same is true of quilters on the GNP who are facing advanced life stages in a world much different from the one they grew up in.

Bronner illuminates many circumstances that have motivated creative journeys for his subjects. Is it possible that quilt making has a similar motives and benefits for those who make them? Paula Gustafson, speaking directly about quilting practices, refers to the quilt making process as one which has the potential to help a quilter "work through" a number issues held within:

> Quilting is only apparently working through layers of fabric with a needle and thread. It may also be working through of a family difficulty, a disappointment, or simply leaving behind the day's realities. Repetitive stitching gives the appearance of 'busy work' (not to be interrupted by childish demands) but, in truth, it is a mantra or mandala, allowing the quilter's thoughts to float free. And unlike other seemingly never-ending domestic activities, such as meals and laundry, the hours spend quilting result in a final, tangible accomplishment. (2002, 201).

She describes quilting as a sort of meditation that, through repetitive acts, allows a quilter to experience release. This is something that several women I spoke to claimed to experience during quilting activities, and it proved to be a great motivator. Other reasons for quilting I encountered include following trends, passing time, keeping one's hands

busy, and seeking a sense of accomplishment. In discussing some of these motivations, I hope to illustrate that the act of making a Newfoundland Quilt may have greater significance and deeper motives than perhaps the quilters themselves are even aware of.

Pastimes and Hard Times

I was frequently told that the Newfoundland Quilt takes a long time to make. A single quilt is usually weeks of work, and if a quilter chooses hand-quilting methods, it takes even longer. It is also frequently suggested that the act of quilting, rather than being an artful endeavor, is "just a pasttime." For many quilters, the process of making a quilt is a way to keep the hands and mind occupied in a productive way, paying little heed to the amount of time spent doing this. Value is ascribed to the act of being busy at something, particularly during retirement years when a person has stopped working, and all of the children have long since grown and moved away. For some, they are motivated by a love of the process, or a way to focus a wandering mind, or even a way to help get past the long winter months. Joyce described sitting in her sewing room in the winter, piecing together pieces of fabric to help pass the time. "In the wintertime," she said, "when there's bad days, and you can't get outdoors, I'm usually in me little room there, sat there sewing. I'll look through my scraps, and if there's anything. I'll pick it up and I'll think, now can I make a quilt out of that scrap? Sew it together. Make a quilt. Sometimes it turns out!" Joyce isn't concerned with the finished product; she quilts to pass the time, especially when the weather is unforgiving. Inga too, says that winter is her time for working on quilts: "I paints them up to the house in the winter time." Then, in the spring, she sews her blocks together. Quilting helps to keep these women busy during the months that Northern Peninsula residents feel especially isolated.

For Gwen, it is not just the winter, but also the windy days in spring and fall that get her working. She mentioned that she often gets up in the middle of the night to quilt, when the wind is blowing, and her husband Scott is out on the boat. She pointed down at a Newfoundland Quilt that she had completed in recent weeks and said, "That could've been at like four o'clock in the morning, when I couldn't sleep, when Scott was gone." Gwen frequently stated how quilting was an activity that distracted her from times of fear and loneliness. She explained that when her husband was busy with work, she needed to keep herself occupied somehow. When she joins him "down to Conche," where he manages the fish plant, she brings along several craft projects to help keep herself busy during his work hours: "I bring this all with me in case I have nothing to do. If I'm here with nothing to do, I'll be off my head in like two days flat. So I bring a little bit of sewing, a little bit of knitting." Without her projects and without the sense of purpose they provide, Gwen believes she would be very unhappy, particularly when her husband is busy with work.

For others, there is an even deeper purpose to such creative acts. Quite often I noticed that women who described quilting as "just a pastime," also ended up telling stories of how quilting has helped them cope with times of great hardship. From difficult rites of passage associated with aging, such as retirement or physical illness, to more unexpected life events such as the untimely deaths of a child or husband, the results were similar, but the *way* the creativity was enacted differed from person to person. For some people, their life difficulty was mentioned at the start of the interview, with absolute awareness that their craftwork stemmed from this particular pain. For others, the connection was more attenuated or hidden. In the latter cases, such stories of hardship

came out at the end of my visit, as either a part of the natural course of conversation, or as a sudden afterthought, that suddenly had to be verbalized. Marie is one such person. She begins by explaining her passion for hand quilting:

> *Marie*: Now, a lot of people like my stitches so people say, "You didn't do that by hand!" "Oh yah, I did." But I love it. I love getting at that.
> *Lisa*: So when you're doing that, do you sit down and think, or are you watching a movie while you do it or…
> *Marie*: No, just sit right there, and just work away. My mind is right on that.

This conversation immediately moved into story of both personal and family strife. After exhibiting her collection of quilts, and talking about the love she has for the process, Marie discussed in detail, some serious life challenges. She clearly acknowledges that quilting is something that captures her attention and keeps both her mind and hands occupied. But could it be that her desire to keep her mind focused on something, may be connected a coping with the hard times she has encountered? While she did not overtly make connections between quilting and life's struggles, I could sense that her quilting habits were directly linked to particular incidents in her life. Marie is an example of a person who has multiple reasons for quilting—some of which are obvious to her, such as a love for the process, a clearing of the mind—and others that might evade her consciousness, such as a coping mechanism in the face of adversity. She explained that in the past, she has had to take a break from quilting during particularly hard times but then resumed afterwards when she was on the mend. Without stating explicitly, she described making quilts as an automatic step that she took towards self-recovery. I met a few other quilters who used quilting in much the same way: having to take a break from it during personal strife, but then engaging with it to assist with emotional recovery. One particular quilter actually used craft-making to help get through the untimely death of her child. At

first she could not do any crafts, as they reminded her of the daughter she lost, but eventually she began to make quilt blocks as a coping mechanism. Instead of lying in bed sleepless, she would get up and work on a quilt. Upon hearing this anecdote, I began to realize the extent to which a person can use crafting to help overcome tribulation.

Another example of someone who uses craft as a coping mechanism is Joyce. In this next excerpt, she jumps from a story of hardship in her family directly into a description of one of her quilts. For her, it seems, the two are overtly linked. Her quilting, whether conscious of it or not, is part of her life story, particularly the more difficult parts of her story:

> I had a brother in Edmonton, he's the youngest in the family, and now he's back in St. John's dying of cancer. Well he had cancer before he went there, to work, but then something happened. It got worse. They said that they had it all, but then, you know. He's only 47 years old, the youngest in the family. That's a Newfoundland Quilt (pointing to a photo) with snowshoes, fish, and the iceberg. We does them all different.

This is not the only anecdote of this nature that Joyce provided. I could sense that the life she had with her husband in Quirpon, while simple and happy, has been a difficult one too. From the death of her son, to the cod moratorium that forced them into early retirement, Joyce has used quilting as a way to get through the hard times. For her, the act of creating crafts is a meditative act wherein she can keep her mind clear and focused, and her hands active. It is also clear that for Joyce, the function of the object is less important than the act of creating it. But for what purpose, then? What meanings can we find in her actions? According to Bronner, creative acts for people during advanced life stages become a "…link between past and present and give(s) a sense of continuity and community" (1985, 152). Joyce, whose life has been marked by difficult moments and transitions, including her son's abrupt death, may have taken up craft to confront and

dissipate some of the evident pain she has experienced. Given the types of historical objects she depicts on her quilts, it is also clear that he is using his craft to physically manifest a past long gone.

Myrtle Lewis, who also describes quilting as a pastime, offered a similar story. Like Joyce, for Myrtle, the link between quilting and recovery was clear. In her case, she actually *took up* quilting in order to get through a physical health crisis. When I asked her about the connection between quilting and recovery, she stated, "I needed a hobby to keep my mind occupied, right? And this is something that really keeps your mind, because your mind is on nothing, only this." Quilting helped her focus attention onto something productive, rather than dwelling on her condition. In the process of healing, she was able to start a new pastime that has followed her beyond recovery and into this new phase of life. On the surface, her quilts are about life in Newfoundland but the sub-textual meanings are much more personal. For her, each quilt is emblematic of a struggle that she faced, and with the help of quilting, was able to overcome.

While I was constantly surprised about what people were willing to share with me, and surprised at how much life difficulty people are confronted with, I've since come to understand that the connection between creativity and trauma is a widely recognized pattern. In her section on "Recycling Traditions," Mary Hufford points towards the effect that crisis can have: "Among older adults we find a kind of artistry that commences at some point in later life, often triggered by a life crisis such as retirement or the death of a loved one. For his medium as well as his content, the older artist often reaches back into his youth to the old people he knew then. A skill such as quilting, fiddling, canning, or carving may be revived" (1987, 25). This description fits nicely with what I noticed of

the women who suddenly found a desire to start quilting—the return to these skills was often "triggered" by a life experience. What is it about practicing traditions that helps people through difficult rites of passage? Patrick Mullen posits that the purpose and meaning brought into one's life through forms of folklore (such as craft) can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of aging individuals (1992, 2). In reference to his studies with the elderly, he states, "Folklore is one of the reasons these nine individuals were mentally healthy in their old age; carrying on cultural and individual traditions helped give meaning to their lives. These were not ordinary elderly people; I was attracted to them in the first place not because they were old but because they were tradition-bearers" (Mullen 1992, 2). This could be said of the tradition-bearers that I visited for this study. They are practicing a tradition that brings purpose and meaning into their lives. Not only were they happy to be engaged in their creative pursuits, some even recognized the personal, emotional gains they garnered through their craft. Even those who cannot see the full impact of their handicraft pastimes are likely still experiencing the benefits.

Continuity and Life Review

Many of the quilters in this study have yet to enter an advanced life-stage, but for those who *have*, it appears that entering old age has an influence on why craft practices are enacted. On top of obvious changes to the body that one faces as they age, there are external changes to the environment that happen over time, forcing people to adapt the way they live and experience the world around them. Individuals are confronted with a series of hurdles—some personal, some unique, some shared, some universal, and the life changes these hurdles cause are not always easy to process. Such hurdles might include facing retirement, dealing with physical deterioration, watching your community shrink,

and/or seeing the social bonds within that community dissolve. Many of the older craftspeople I visited claimed to feel sadness over how their communities have changed over the years, and in these discussions, some also expressed feeling loneliness. When I asked ninety-four-year-old Laura Chambers if she enjoyed living in Flower's Cove, she stated "It is lonesome sometimes for me. There were very many families where I lived to up in Barr'd Harbour after I got married. I enjoyed it up there." Laura and her husband were married "sixty odd years" before his death. Afterwards, she found that she had to move closer to family for physical and emotional support—away from her home in Barr'd Harbour. It was a relocation that she has never fully recovered from. Laura also described some cultural changes that she has had difficulty adjusting to. With fondness, she reflected on the days when her family used to keep cattle. "Everyone used to have cows," she explained "It is a lot different now. The roads got through and all that had to be taken out for the road." Even though this happened decades ago, Laura still thinks about this change to the landscape, and how it has impacted her way of life. When I asked if she missed the old way of life, Laura said "I like it all right. I tell you, we was more happier then, than it is today."

To talk about change with any elderly residents such as Laura is to consider such experiences as relocation and isolation, and the contributing role of modernization of the region, changes to social structure, and of course, the impact of economic and lifestyle shifts such as those seen during cod moratorium. Gertrude Hunt, a quilter and knitter who lives in Conche, told me about her life spent working at the local fish plant. It was a job that she enjoyed very much and so when she retired, after working there for twenty-eight years, she found herself feeling lonely and isolated. She explained the root of her feelings

in the following: "Before, there was people to talk to everyday. Now I'm home. I don't see anybody." Over the course of a lifetime, as a person approaches elderly status, certain rites of passage, such as retirement, and other changes, like physical illness, may culminate in feelings of physical and social isolation. Although many of these changes are a necessary part of the aging process, the ways we each decide to navigate and cope with such issues tends to be deeply personal. A person already inclined towards textile crafts may begin quilting in a more serious and regimented way than ever before, expressing a different range of values in the process. Or a man, who is good with his hands, may begin carving figures, or making models. What motivates older individuals to make material objects? Bronner speaks on the connection between creativity and aging in the following:

> Creativity is the common thread through all ages, but worthy of our attention is the motivation that draws all people to material arts. We can increasingly see the use of creativity as adaptation. The craftsmen are adapting to changing ways of doing things and viewing things. They are adapting themselves to a new stage of life. As people age, the objects they create change and their reasons for creating change, but the underlying aesthetics they developed in childhood and share with others in adulthood influence how they view the world and how they alter it (Bronner 1985, 152).

In this passage he postulates that people turn to craft practices in their later years to help them to adjust to new life stages. He explains that as people age, they tend to explore creativity as an avenue through which they can deal with the changing world around them, in a productive fashion, staying true to the skills and values acquired throughout a lifetime.

I wondered if this accounts for at least one reason that many Northern Peninsula women make quilts during advanced life stages and if so, what socio-cultural changes they have faced. I asked Gert Hunt if she had noticed any significant changes to Conche

over the years. Her answer is representative of what I heard from several women who were in advanced stages of life, living in various communities across the peninsula:

> *Lisa*: So have you seen a lot of change to the region since you've moved here?
> *Gert*: Oh my god, yes. There's change with everything. Change with everything—the weather, the people [long pause]. One time you could pop in anywhere have a cup of tea. There's certain places you might be able to go in, but…I don't go in anywhere unless I'm invited now. People used to come to my house too, but the people who used to come don't even come anymore. So, it is after changing.
> Lisa: That is a big social change. Why?
> *Gert*. I don't know. Anyone can come in here, doesn't matter to me.
> *Lisa*: Do you think more people are at home watching TV, Internet?
> *Gert*: Could be, yes, could be. Internet, yes, that's a lot of it. I don't think I'd have one, if someone give me one.
> *Lisa*: You don't have it?
> *Gert*: No. Francis wants me to get one and I says, "No way!" There'd be no knitting done, there'd be no cleaning done, there'd be no cooking done.

For her, the disappearance of visiting routines is symbolic of a larger social change that she has witnessed. She claims to have seen change "to everything" and I sensed that all this change has had an irreparable impact on her. The social changes she describes have contributed to an experience of overall isolation within her own community. She believes the shift away from community has been partly due to modernization, and therefore, she doesn't wish to participate in some of the newer developments, such as the Internet. Her feelings of community detachment have been compounded by the fact that in recent years, she has had to face retirement. This has reduced her contact with community members even further. Gert, like many others in her generation, is confronting feelings of discontinuity and just maybe, her craft practices are helping her to close some of these gaps. Through carrying on traditions, Gert can maintain a sense of connection to the past, while remaining active and engaged in the present. In doing so, it is also possible that she is able to assert a sense of purpose in her life as she moves into an uncertain future.

Joyce and her husband Lloyd shared similar feelings of discontinuity and disappointment over the changes they have seen to their home community. The two have been married for close to forty years and have always been residents of Quirpon. Once a bustling port town, Quirpon has dwindled significantly over the past few decades. The end of the harbour activity, coupled with the necessity of young people to move away for employment, have given Quirpon the identity of an *aging community*, with most residents at a post-retirement life-stage. As retirees, both Lloyd and Joyce have used their creative activities to keep busy. Joyce's husband Lloyd, who is locally known for his handicrafts, talked with me about when and why he began making models from wood. For him, and likely for his wife too, the onset of his craft activities were directly linked to the moratorium on cod fishing, when they both found themselves being forced to give up the way of life they had always known:

> *Lisa*: You're a bit crafty you say?
> *Lloyd*: We're old crafty people.
> *Lisa*: How long have you been making models?
> *Lloyd*: Ever since fishing was up, so since '92.
> *Lisa*: In '92 you switched gears and started making models?
> *Lloyd*: Actually, there was nothing else to go at.
> *Lisa*: Do you always do boats and lighthouses?
> *Lloyd*: I don't do lighthouses. Boats and ships and that, different boats. I started doing different stuff but that's for later on, right? That stuff is for later on.

Lloyd began making models when his life was disrupted by the moratorium. Joyce, who once fished alongside her husband, began making Newfoundland Quilts around that same time. Their respective hobbies run parallel to one another. Both pastimes require a great deal of time and energy and both generate objects that visually reflect life in Newfoundland. Joyce chooses to quilt images from the seal and cod fishery, as well as iconic Newfoundland scenes, while Lloyd makes wooden boats, ships, and motors—

objects directly symbolic of a life spent on the water—a life he has had to give up. In the following piece of dialogue, Joyce explains that the wooden engine model in display in their living room is a replica of what would be used on motorboats in the past (see fig. 67):

> *Joyce:* He makes em there out on the bridge. He does the boats. He makes boats. Titanic is his main one. … He also makes little ones [*points to a model*] it is an engine. It used to go in the motorboat at one time. He makes outboard motor models.

The outboard motor is a clear example of something from Lloyd's past, that through craft, he is able to bring into the present.

Fig. 67 – Outboard Motor Model by Lloyd Young

Lloyd stayed inside while Joyce took me on a tour of her husband's store and workshop, the winter home of his largest model to date—a replica of the Titanic (see fig. 68). It was while in the workshop, away from Lloyd's presence, that Joyce offered more information about why Lloyd began making his models. Though this revealing conversation was brief, I was able to comprehend how complex the symbol of the Titanic is for Lloyd. Not only is it a symbol of the fishery, the notable sinking ship metaphor, it is also symbolic of the son that they lost around that same time. All at once, the fishery was gone, Lloyd lost his livelihood and identity as a fisherman, and then their son suddenly passed away. According to Joyce, Lloyd never quite recovered from this loss, or combination of losses. So Lloyd began doing the only thing he could—he started making models. After all, as he explained in our conversation, "…there was nothing else to go at." Bronner found that his chain-carvers were compelled in similar ways. Of one particular carver he stated, "Faced with a difficult adjustment to retirement and loneliness, he looked to, and materialized, memories of childhood. He considered that time simpler and easier" (1985, 38). Given the series of events that unfolded in their lives, and the fact that they are aging in an isolated, ever-changing community, it is of no surprise that Joyce and Lloyd have found craft useful means through which to confront these issues. In fact, their craft behaviors help us to gain insight into how individuals experience aging and what kind of "broader social patterns of old age" might be at work (Mullen 1992, 3). While Lloyd makes wooden model boats, Joyce makes a sort of model too, to meet the same goal. Her model, though, is two-dimensional and takes the form of a quilt.

Fig. 68 – Titanic Model by Lloyd Young

Finding occasion to quote Hufford, Bronner explains how dramatic life events can be displaced through craft activity. But he also found something else at work for the chain-carvers:

> It was a way to displace tragedy of death and pain common in their lives. That is only part of the story, I found, but what is significant is the reflection that often accompanies creativity. Some artists go through a life-review process as they work, "allowing the reintegration of difficult events from the past with present experiences" (1985, 152).

Are Lloyd and Joyce simply coping with drastic changes in their lives through making crafts? Or is there something to be said of the role of reminiscence? Is Lloyd's wooden engine model a tool for reminiscence?

An indispensable resource for considering life-stage connections to creativity is Hufford et al.'s aforementioned book *Grand Generation* (1987). This work explores the issue of creativity by placing material culture and personal history hand in hand. Indeed, the process of making craft may help people confront and overcome change in their lives,

but they might also be using creativity as a tool for reflecting on the past. Making objects as way to reminisce is what Mary Hufford refers to as a *life review process*. It is a way of people in advanced life stages to think about and express different aspects of their life stories. In the following passage, Hufford explains the connection between a person's life story and the objects that they make. Here, she stresses the importance of folklorists to observe these connections, in order to have a fuller understanding of what kinds of meanings and messages a craftsperson may be trying to express their craft objects:

> Prodigious memory applied to a long life is precisely what has always attracted folklorists to the elderly, but only recently have we appreciated the importance of reminiscence in the aging process itself. And only now are we attending to the variety of forms that remembering can take. A lifetime of stories may be captured in the pieces of a quilt, a collection of recipes, a repertoire of songs or fiddle tunes, a carved can, mementos on a mantelpiece, miniature recreations of old tools, and most commonly, in the sharing of experience through language. The successful integrating of a long lifetime of experience requires both a medium and witnesses (Hufford et al. 1987, 14).

While the quilting process may help a quilter to ease through changes and discontinuities in her life, how can specific quilt symbols become tools for personal expression? As Rita Parrill draws out and colors in images for her Newfoundland Quilt—a Bombardier snow bus, a pair of sealskin boots, a wood-burning stove—what is going through her mind? What is she trying to express? What does all this *mean* to her? Although she could not answer such questions verbally, I can surmise that her quilting is a kind of life review project that helps her to bring aspects of past into present times. Lloyd remembers being out on the fishing boat. He remembers what the boats looked like, the motors and engines too, and so he makes replicas of them, pulling them closer to his present life. Patrick Mullen explains that this kind of active reflection helps to close gaps for the elderly—ones caused by social and cultural upheaval, and personal dilemmas (1992, 18). He

states, " Elderly people will use reminiscence, personal narrative, traditional beliefs and customs, folk art, and a wide range of expressive culture as part of life review because all of these forms function to integrate the disparate elements of their lives" (Mullen 1992, 18). For Rita, Joyce and Lloyd, as they participate in "artistic expression," they are able to reminisce, address what it means to age, and pay tribute to the past while remaining active in the present.

As an observer of these objects, and a listener to these stories, I've also come to understand the important role of the witness to the life review process. It is one thing to make an object, and it is another thing to exhibit it for an audience. Mullen discusses the vital role of the observer in the next passage:

> An equally important element in the life review process is to communicate it to others, to engage an audience so that everyone comes to a shared understanding, in other words, to perform it as folklore. ...Thus, the life review has important personal and communal functions: it establishes the identity of the individual elderly persona, and it connects one generation to another, passing on or reconstructing traditions that are important for the survival of the community (Mullen 1992, 18).

Since I am of a younger generation, my role of observer, and the knowledge I could acquire in this role, became of particular importance. As I viewed Rita's oil lamp quilt block, I could sense her attentiveness to my own attentiveness. The memories this image carries for her are ones that she was eager to pass on, from one generation to the next. Without this transfer of knowledge, held in her narrative *and* as a physical manifestation in her quilt, this quilting process would not be as powerful as it is. Her rendering of a past life helped us come to a "shared understanding" of what her experience of Newfoundland was like in the past, and how she must come to terms with what it is like now. Not only is her quilt an important part of her own life story, but it is important to the observer as well

as the greater community, in how it can bridge gaps in understanding, and how it can strengthen community in the process.

Reflecting and Reshaping

As I reflect on the numerous conversations I had with individuals on the GNP, I can see that many of them are exhibiting a set of material responses to the process of aging. Meanwhile, they are challenging witnesses, such as myself, into rethinking "…basic assumptions about the nature of memory, tradition, and old age" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in Hufford 1987, 12). As Mullen reminds us, these tradition-bearers are not stubbornly stuck in the past; they are simply keeping traditions alive by making use of them to help cope with the present (1992, 2). With this in mind, after confronting my own assumptions about what it means to age, I have come to recognize some of the socio-cultural conditions that see the rise of new traditions. I have also learned about the ways in which memory is connected to both tradition and creative acts, and again, how a range of values can be expressed individually and regionally through traditional activities such as quilt making.

Conclusion

In the first week of July, after spending two months on the Northern Peninsula, I found myself driving back down the Conche road for the last time. It would be a long journey home and I knew it would give me much needed time to reflect on all I had seen, all I had done, and all I had learned. During this drive, I finally had a chance to flip "meaning" on its head and try to figure out what Newfoundland Quilts had come to represent for *me*. This quilt, with its tidy array of symbols, had come to mean something altogether different than I had ever expected. Embedded in this quilt type is not just an idea of Newfoundland past, present, future, but also a series of my own memories from my first time seeing one, to my second time, to my third, to my realization that this quilt was captivating me. The quilts underwent progressive leaps in significance under my watchful eye: "Ethnographic objects move from curio to specimen to art, though not necessarily in that order. As curiosities, objects are anomalous. By definition, they defy classification" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 25). Indeed, for me, this pictorial quilt started off a curiosity but eventually, I saw them as much more. The quilts became inherently meaningful objects of aesthetic, cultural, social, and personal value. They became artistic expressions that defied the classifications I so eagerly wanted to put on them. Are these quilts crafts? Are they folk art objects? Are they fine art objects? Does it even matter? The ability for the Newfoundland Quilt to scratch heads and defy boundaries make them all the more fascinating and meaningful from the perspective of the observer, the person who posses or observes the quilt. As I took on this role of observer, as I looked, queried, listened, photographed, recorded, analyzed, all related memories have integrated themselves into my own perception of the Newfoundland Quilt. On top of all the meanings the quilters

give to the Newfoundland Quilt, for me it also represents new friendships, difficult conversations, careful queries, digital cameras, gravel roads, phone calls, door bells, berry pies, quilting workshops, and twenty or more, glorious whale sightings. In fact, if I were to make my own Newfoundland Quilt, it would likely represent these individual memories of mine, rather than anything from the familiar canon. Thinking back on this now, I am reminded of how personal our interpretation of objects can be—how objects can resonate with memories and feelings unique to how we experience them as individuals, and how this impacts the way we make things too.

Writing this almost a full year after the completion of my fieldwork, I am still left surprised at how the women in this study were more keen on talking about *how* they put their quilts together, rather than what the quilts mean to them as keepsakes, as heirlooms, or as two-dimensional models, full of meaning. But through this step-by-step process of tracing, drawing, cutting, and sewing, indelible icons are created—it is this canon of icons that make it a tradition of its own. When a Newfoundland Quilt comes to life, its surface becomes a mode of expression for the quilters, helping them to say something that they don't quite have the words for.

Atop the silent expressiveness of the quilts, what has been of utmost importance to me in this study is that the quilters have been given a voice to discuss what they *could* express— their skills and their life experiences. This collection of voices, which I hope has been heard, is part of a larger recognition that the quilters here, and others like them, are actively shaping a cultural landscape that upcoming generations will be encountering and interpreting in their own right. These quilts speak for a particular region, and particular life-stage. They become picture albums that tell a story. It is the story of where

they are from, how they have sustained themselves, the animals that they share the land with, the extinct objects they remember, the tools that they use, the cultural traditions that they practice, and the ones that they long for, now tucked away somewhere in the past. As the future unfolds, the Newfoundland Quilt will likely take on a succession of modern forms, with icons that are relevant to those making the quilts during that point in the unknown future. They too will be tradition-bearers, helping maintain a sense of collective and personal identity in a sea of change. It has taken me several chapters to try and demonstrate a fact about material culture that Henry Glassie states concisely and indelibly, in a single sentence: "Art embodies, and insistently exhibits, personal and collective identities, aesthetic and instrumental purposes, mundane and spiritual aspirations" (1999, 42). What I hope to have demonstrated is that the Newfoundland Quilt is not just an object. The dynamic range of meanings held within the quilt top, and process of making it, come together to express myriad values and experiences. The quilt speaks of what it's like to be a Newfoundlander on the Northern Peninsula, and what it's like to make things, and what it's like to experience life, to go through rites of passage, to confront change and overcome hurdles, and ultimately, what it's like to grow older. One of the most important things I have learned from all this is something that apparently lies in human nature and something that I have turned to Patrick Mullen to help me express: "…that the impulse toward engagement and continuity is strong in the human spirit, and it does not disappear with age" (1992, 23). What I learned about the quilters themselves, and the other craftspeople that I met, is that while each individual carries a unique life story, they have each found a way to persevere through all of life's challenges—through times of hardship, times of rapid change, and as the body and mind inevitably age—

objects of utmost meaning and beauty as the outcome. As Rita explained things to me and showed me her objects, she also remembered, reminisced, and ultimately, expressed a set of values and ideals. And I am reminded one last time of the important role of folk objects are in a person's life, as they hold secret, yet telling messages (Bronner 1985, 152). "What people say through objects can break through the silence of growth and living" (Bronner 1985, 152). I wondered then, how did making craft help Rita "break through the silence?" Like everyone else I met, Rita had memories, struggles, worries and joys in her life. She took these feelings and experiences and did something that helped her to make sense of the world—she made a work of art. The outcome is a handmade quilt that, transcending simplicity, takes on powerful hidden meanings that will inevitably continue to shift and twist and offer her a pathway to the future.

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