

THE ARGIN' GROUND:  
A SOCIAL LOCUS IN TROUT RIVER circa 1920-  
PRESENT

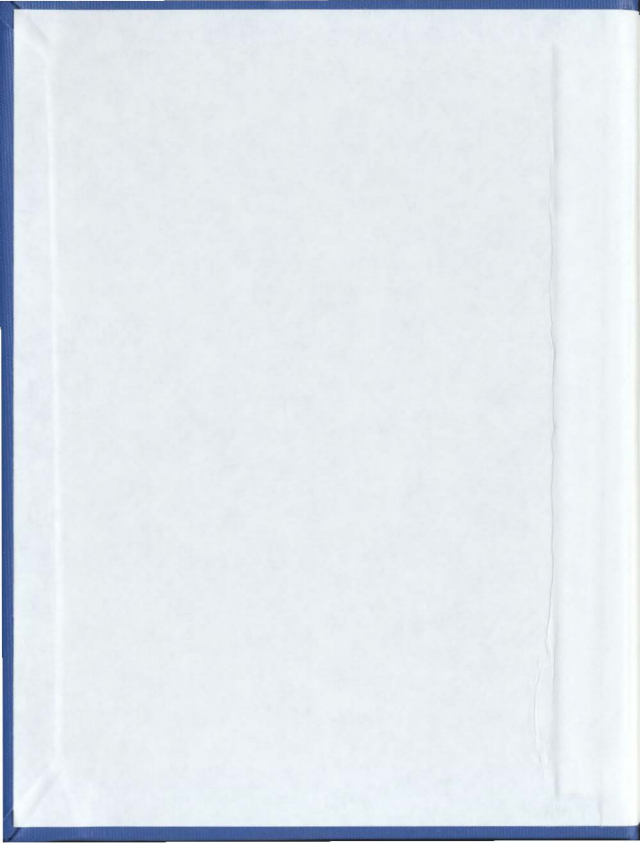
CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**The Argin' Ground: A Social Locus in Trout River *circa* 1920 - present**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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**Department of Folklore  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of the rememberings of the people of Trout River, of a special and significant part of their ancestry. It is about a gathering place, mainly of fishermen and other males. It is a place that no longer exists, except in the minds of the men who went there, the boys and girls (now men and women) who remember their father going there, or their own play around the periphery of this well known spot, in earlier years known by the whole community as 'The Argin' Ground.' It was a place of information transfer and interaction that has now been replaced by the telephone, television, radio, dart leagues, bingo, the pub, and cruising down the road in an automobile.

This is a work of historical ethnography and my intention in doing this research is to give back to the people a significant part of their heritage which I think is worth preserving. Though it is a reconstruction the value of conserving this place in some form is undeniable.

Chapter One is the introduction and also includes notes regarding the methodology used for transcription of interviews and citation.

Chapter Two contains a brief history of the community of Trout River, including descriptions of the town itself and the surrounding area. Within this chapter, section one contains information about the community's development. Section two discusses the four principal types of fisheries practised by the people of Trout River; salmon, herring, lobster and cod. Section three touches on the land based activities the residents engaged in to



survive. These include hunting and trapping, logging, farming and raising livestock, participating in the development of mineral resources and canning seafood. The final section of Chapter Two discusses the genealogy of the community, particularly the earliest generations, from the founding settler, George Crocker, onwards. This section also includes family trees of the first three generations of Crockers who lived in Trout River.

Chapter Three deals with the Argin' Ground and is divided into three sections. The first describes the Argin' Ground itself, including its location, membership and the type of activities that took place there. The second section deals with the context of the social interaction that went on there. Included is the structure of the talk and the narratives that were told there as well as a description of the various generic forms encountered there, such as the proverb, gossip and rhetoric. Also the style of the local speech is dealt with here. Section three deals with the status of the Argin' Ground in the community and with how the meeting place actually functioned in terms of information transfer and the other activities that took place there.

Chapter Four discusses the changes that have taken place, and are still taking place, within the community of Trout River and how this has affected the Argin' Ground as a social institution. Here as well are three sections, the first of which deals with the creation of Gros Morne National Park. The second section discusses the changing social context and the current social dynamics within the community. The final section looks into the role of the Argin' Ground in the community.

Chapter Five is the conclusion and summarizes the arguments presented.

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The spirit of my brother Ray is ever present because he had so much energy for life. He died at the age of thirty two years, leaving me with these words 'you show them what you can do'. I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland for the start of my graduate program. Even though the program was demanding, the lectures were always informative and interesting.

The archivist and students whom I met at the folklore archive were a tremendous help. In particular I want to say that Dr. Philip Hiscock read my work several times and offered helpful suggestions. Dr. Melissa Ladenhiem who was someone who offered her infinite storage of knowledge. I thank them both very much. With the combined efforts of my fellow twelve students who started this journey with me, I have developed a greater appreciation for the many diverse forms of folklore.

I give thanks also to the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) for the funding of research and fieldwork in the community of Trout River. In addition to this financial support I also received Student Assistantships for the nine semesters I spent in St. John's doing my graduate courses and library research. In many ways MUNFLA (Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive ) became my second home. Not only is it a wonderful place to work but learn much in the process of dubbing The Fishermen's Broadcast or cataloguing some personal diaries or audio tapes that would be left on our doorstep. It was always challenging and very informative.

Dr. Larry Small was my advisor when I entered the Folklore Department and I want to say "Thank You, Larry" for holding a place for me. Dr. Gerald Thomas was my first supervisor and with him we narrowed my original topic of Frolics and the Argin' Ground to just concentrating on the Argin' Ground. He said "Do you think you have enough material for that?" I said. "I think I do, but if I do not I will find it." Unfortunately Dr. Thomas retired before my thesis was completed. I do wish to acknowledge my deep appreciation for his help. When I came to Corner Brook Dr. John Ashton agreed to supervise the progress of my thesis. I am extremely grateful for the time he has given to both me and my assistant. He made it possible for me to "believe in my ability to pull it all together." Thank you John.

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My thoughts, of course go out to the people of the little community of Trout River, of which I have written about their "Argin' Ground"- a gathering place of fishermen. I must thank my first informant and friend Lucy White, who spent many hours going around to houses and introducing me to the people. Hursie and Fred Crocker always left their door open for me to drop in for a break and a bite to eat. Without them I would never have got the 'feel' of the town and for their giving hearts I am extremely grateful.

In each home that I visited and did my audio taping the people were very hospitable and, I think, proud to give their reminiscences, for other generations to read and learn a little more about the everyday lives and work of their ancestors. I would like in particular to thank the following people: Alex and Alice White, Marjorie and Herbert Barnes, Tom and Trephina Crocker, Catherine Snook, Stella and Harvey Hann, Wilheminie Crocker, Delilah Duval, Stewart Crocker, Dulcie (Toss) White, Gilbert and Myra Crocker, Albert and Romane Crocker, Brazel Brake, Isaac and Flora Crocker, Stella and Heber White, Lawrence and Basil Crocker, Charles Crocker, Eric Brake, Bert and Mona MacLean, Andrew Barnes, Verna Barrett, Claren and Hughie Brake, George Crocker, Sandra and Rhoda Barnes, Margaret Parsons, and Rita Crocker.

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I acknowledge gratefully the support of each and all who have helped.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My first thought of doing a masters degree in folklore came in 1981 when I sat in on one of David Buchan's presentations. I was finishing the last year of my bachelor's degree in English and was uncertain of where to go with it afterwards. Dr. Buchan's talk, however, interested me enough to make me go to his office and speak to him. I arranged my courses, some of which were cross-overs, so that I graduated with a minor in Folklore and a major in English. The twists and turns of life at that time took me to many places around the island. Also the birth and raising of two children along with a great deal of volunteer work, which automatically goes along with parenthood, all occupied my time. Folklore though was always in the back of my mind.

In 1991 I decided that I wanted to return to Memorial University to pursue graduate studies. I called Dr. Buchan and he became one of my entry references. With the children past their early years and not in need of constant supervision, we moved to St. John's where I began my studies. The courses were all interesting and completed in 1992. The thesis took a little longer. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to do a topic that focussed on the community of Trout River. It was the place of my ancestors and I had heard many stories about the place. There was so much that could be written that at first choosing a 'small' feasible area was difficult. I was number seven in my family and we had left that little outpost when I was six years old. We did not move very far, just eighteen miles to Woody Point. Although I was very young at the time what stood out in my mind most about Trout River was this gathering place. My mother used to say 'your



father is up on the Argin' Ground'. I thought it must be an exciting and important place. So in 1992 I set out on an adventure to 'find' this place when I began doing my fieldwork. My topic was and is 'The Argin' Ground: A Social Locus in Trout River circa 1920 - present'. I wanted to discover what the nature of this place was, from the oldest memory of it in the community, around 1920, up to its effect on the present, roughly 1992.

When travelling to the community of Woody Point by car, the traveller will find themselves passing through some of the most beautiful forest and marine landscape on the West Coast of Newfoundland. But in turning off onto the road to go to Trout River the traveller is totally unprepared for what awaits them. The highway that runs to Trout River is through a canyon, and unlike the previous twisting ride through Gros Morne it is almost completely straight. On either side are the Long Range Mountains, called the Tablelands by the region's locals. On the left driving out soar the yellow rock Tabletop Mountains, barren all the way from their flat peaks to the highway. In stark contrast the other side of the road is green, forested from the highway straight up to the mountain peaks. The contrasting view is breathtaking. Eventually the traveller will arrive at the sign denoting the limits of the town of Trout River. The best route to take here is to turn right where the road winds down from the plateau above the community and the whole expanse of sandy beachfront is visible, including the curve at the western point where Trout River itself meets the ocean. From this vantage point the traveller can see the river winding like a snake under the western hills toward its pond origin. Following the main road will bring

the traveller through the community itself, parallelling first the coastline and then the river. At the end of the road the traveller will have reached both the pond, known locally as 'in to The Pond', and the river's end, and the tour of the community will be complete.

My first day of fieldwork on June 29, 1992 turned out unexpectedly to be a sad occasion. It was the summertime and I drove into the pond at the end of the community. There was a large number of people gathered, very silently, possibly several hundred. There were forty cars there. I spoke to Lucy White, someone I recognized from many years before. She told me a sixteen-year-old boy had drowned when the boat that he was a passenger in overturned. He couldn't swim. His body was still in the water being looked for by the RCMP.

A few days later I decided to make contact again with Lucy and tell her of my intentions to do research in the community. She too was excited about this idea and agreed to walk around the community with me visiting certain homes. All of the people I spoke to remembered my parents who had spent 20 years there earlier. The people were very hospitable and welcomed me into their homes and lives. For two months that summer I spoke with over a hundred people, and recorded 37 cassettes, some of which contain the voices of several men and women on a single tape. They were all over 35 years old, the oldest was 89. I intentionally chose that group because they were all familiar with the Argin' Ground and knew immediately the space I was asking about. Although many of them were not participants of the 'talk' of the gathering place, many had played games there.

That Christmas of 1992 I went back again to Trout River. It was bitterly cold. I spent a week there at that time and short one- or two-day stints afterwards. There were phone calls made to some informants and then library research.

Part of the difficulty I faced in studying the Argin' Ground was the fact that as a discrete entity it no longer existed. Hence the work I embarked upon was one of historical ethnography which would create certain challenges. To begin with there were no written records of the Argin' Ground, thus the texture, text and context of the speech events that took place there would have to be reconstructed. A certain amount of speculation would also be involved if I was to join the various parts together into an understandable whole. But the project was justified, I felt, because I realized that the Argin' Ground had connected members of this community together for so long, and indeed still connected them to that place and to their past.

The Argin' Ground itself was fully functional from the late 1800s until the 1950s when the meeting place gradually declined in importance. There were few people left alive who actually participated directly in the interactions on that spot. Thus, my work would be one of reconstructing the past. There were a few men gathering on the wharf which was further out towards The Point. However none of them lingered long and no formal meeting place reemerged. As well as gathering oral history I did extensive research in libraries, personal records, archives and the Internet. By understanding the factors that had shaped the community and its people I could more accurately complete the process of reconstruction.

In his, A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore Kenneth Goldstein discusses the interview as a means of obtaining information.

The information which may be obtained through observation by the collector is limited to situations and performances which are external to the inner man; but in so far as the informant's feeling and judgements are concerned, interviewing is as direct a means of obtaining information as any other, and frequently it is the only means of obtaining such information (Goldstein 104).

Goldstein also discusses the following situation, which is fieldwork analogous to my own with respect to the Argin' Ground:

*Descriptions of folklore situations which the collector is unable to observe:* Folklorists are as interested in folklore of the past as of the present for the two together give them an opportunity to study the forces of change. And they are equally interested in the many modern folklore situations and materials which they are unable to observe (Goldstein 107).

Luckily, even though I was unable to obtain direct observational data for the Argin' Ground, I was able to obtain other natural context information. This material pertains to what Goldstein calls a 'semi-formal natural context observation.' (Goldstein 80-83) At this gathering place jokes were laughed at, insults were bantered about, narratives were told and old proverbs exchanged. And on the periphery games were played by children. During the interview process I was also able to observe the important contextual element of Trout River dialect, as I was surrounded by it and all of my informants spoke it to one degree or another. This was extremely useful in establishing facts about the Argin' Ground, as will be further explained in Section 3.2. In explaining the context I refer to James Faris' article on another Newfoundland example in which he describes the structure of verbal interaction in terms of the 'rules' which govern successful

communication. He does this using two assumptions which are basic to understanding patterned verbal communication. One is setting, which is where the talk takes place, and the other is transmission. He suggests that the dynamics of communication are largely the same regardless of the content or function it served. Content would change depending on age and sex. Information transmitted locally would be considered news by men and gossip by women (Faris Anthropologica 235-237). The fieldwork of Larry Small, on Newfoundland's Northeast Coast, also looks at communication through traditional expressions. He describes the function of personal narrative as follows:

During Jack's lifetime his narratives functioned as strategies of adaptation, a way of coming to terms with the social and economic situations of his time. Confronted with periods of conflict and anxiety his narratives functioned as platforms of action, on-the-spot solutions to various problems (Small 15).

Most people's remembrances of the location of the Argin' Ground were similar.

One 57-year-old informant, Dave Crocker when asked about the Argin' Ground had this to say:

\*It was up on The Point - - on The Turn.  
There was Uncle Lance's house, across from Tom Crocker's.  
There was a store<sup>1</sup> house next to that.  
There was another store where they kept fishing gear.  
The Argin' Ground was in front of the store. They could see the water out between the stores as they stood there (Crocker Personal

---

1

A store in Trout River was a place where fishing gear and other occupational supplies were kept. As well, the store was often used for carpentry work and was generally set apart from the main dwelling area. This corresponds to the definition given in the DNE (Story, G. M. and W. J. Kirwin and J. D. A. Widdowson, ed. Dictionary of Newfoundland English 2ed with Supplement. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1990).

### Interview).

Dave also said that near this store was a wood pile and a chopping block. He and other informants noted that the sand on the Argin' Ground was hard, packed down from the constant motion of the men that stood there. This was in contrast to the loose sand that stretched along the entire length of the beach all the way to the mouth of the river (**Figure 1.0**).

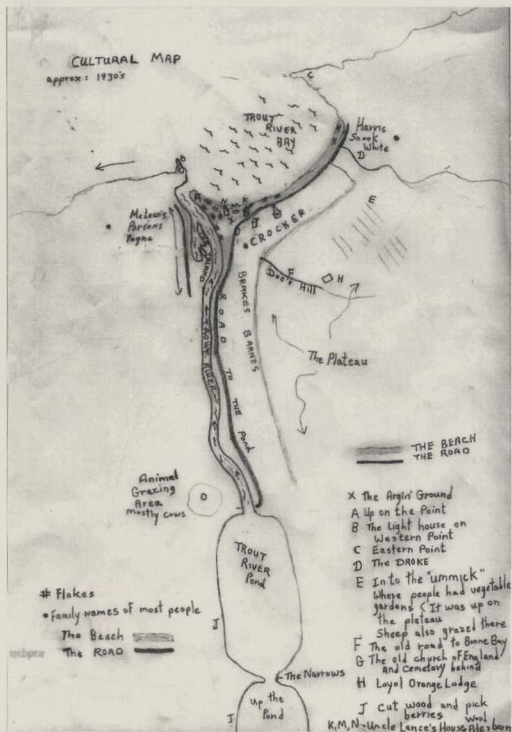
But the Argin' Ground was more than simply a place where men gathered. Primarily it was a spot for the transmission of information, in just about all its verbal forms. As the main point of information gathering and distribution during its existence, the Argin' Ground also served as a place for the dissemination of culture and tradition. This transmitted world view consisted mostly of ideas about the immediate environment, that is ideas of family, society and work. The Argin' Ground also served as a location where catharsis was possible, a release valve for the pressures of such a close-knit community. Lastly, the place was a symbol of the culture, a location that defined and was defined by the people that experienced it both directly and indirectly.

My intention in doing this thesis is to give a community a piece of their history that they can feel proud of and in doing so I am building on the work of many, many scholars who have gathered cultural material in other parts of the province and the world. In particular I would like to acknowledge the work of William Bascom, particularly his 'Four Functions of Folklore.' He believed that folklore functioned 1) for amusement, 2) for validating culture, 3) for education, and 4) maintaining conformity (Bascom 333-349).

**Figure 1.0**

A cultural map of Trout River.

Figure 1.0



Cultural map of Trout River. Drawn by author. 2001.



His functional approach also informs the later performance-centred works of Abrahams, Bauman and others that are cited throughout the pages that follow.

Like most scholarly documents this work incorporates information from a large variety of sources. These sources are cited here using the MLA Style, except where a more precise explanation is required, at which point footnotes are used. This is primarily the case with local vernacular, where for purposes of clarification the local usage is compared to the definition given in the Dictionary of Newfoundland English by Story, Kirwin and Widdowson.

The fieldwork consisted primarily of interviewing the members of the community of Trout River, mostly those old enough to have some recollection of the Argin' Ground. The majority of the information used in the thesis that is attributed to interviews actually comes directly from the conversations on the tapes, with very little coming from field notes taken at the time. For the purposes of citation, however, the reader can assume that unless stated explicitly the information cited for the taped interviews comes directly from them and not from field notes. It should be noted that neither case applies to the referencing of local terms with the Dictionary of Newfoundland English. This is because the Trout River terms are from the author's own knowledge and not from either the field notes or the interviews.

**Figure 1.1**

This is an extended fold out view of the entire town of Trout River from the hills to the south.

In terms of the interviews and the transcriptions a certain method and style were selected. As a basis for transcription the second edition of The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History by Edward Ives was used. Verbatim quotes from the interviews are marked with an asterisk at the beginning, pauses are represented by two hyphens, and actions and author notes are bracketed and italicized. This format was modified slightly in the following ways and for the following reasons: pauses of longer than five seconds are represented by the starting of a new, indented line. This was done primarily for ease of reading but also to give the reader a feel for how the people interviewed spoke. In many cases a simple conversation could consist of a great many breaks of this sort, especially when speaking to older people who would take their time conveying an idea or story. Such was simply the way they communicated. It was for this second reason, the way people communicated, that it was decided that most quotes would be taken verbatim from the tapes. In this way the reader would be able to get an idea, or a feel for how the people of Trout River actually spoke along with the information conveyed in the transcribed passage. It should also be noted that, because of the number of tapes involved in the interview process they have been listed in a separate appendix and not in the bibliography itself. Any references such as (Crocker #x) refer to Appendix A for citation purposes and not the bibliography.





## **Chapter Two: A Brief History of Trout River from Founding to Present**

In order to understand a community, or one of its constituents, it is necessary to understand the historical context in which it developed. This is especially true of an intangible place like the Argin' Ground, which played such an important role in the community in terms of information transfer and socialization, but physically was no more than a piece of open ground. To establish this historical context then I will start by looking at the community itself, its layout and, briefly, its development. I will then consider what people did to survive, which itself had a tremendous effect in defining the community of Trout River. I will begin here with the fisheries, salmon, herring, lobster and cod, and then move into the occupations that complemented them, namely trapping and the fur trade, timber harvesting, agriculture and livestock, mineral development, and canning.

## **Section I. Community Development**

Trout River is located in an inlet along the shores of the West Coast of Newfoundland. The mouth of this little bay is quite wide and is exposed to the wrath of the ocean. On the western point of the bay there is a winding river and it is from this prominent geographical feature that the community took its name. The mouth of the river serves as the location of the main wharf and also as the only reasonable breakwater in this open bay as can be seen in **Figure 2.0**. For this reason and also for its moderate depth it is used as a refuge for speedboats and longliners. This is necessary because these vessels are simply too large to be pulled up on the beach for every storm. The river itself winds inland for approximately 2.5 kilometres to a large pond generally known to the locals as 'the Pond'. In truth there are actually two ponds that feed the river and are connected by a space of water generally known as 'The Narrows'. The vernacular distinction between the two entails the first part being called 'in the pond' and the second part being called 'up the pond'.

Over the years the mouth of the river has been dredged many times. It is a process that has been made necessary primarily because of the ocean sediment that collects there rather than that which comes down with the river itself. This dredging is particularly important as it makes the space more accessible to the fishing boats that have grown in size since the early part of the twentieth century. The best example of this is the longliner-style boat, which is upwards of 15 metres in length.

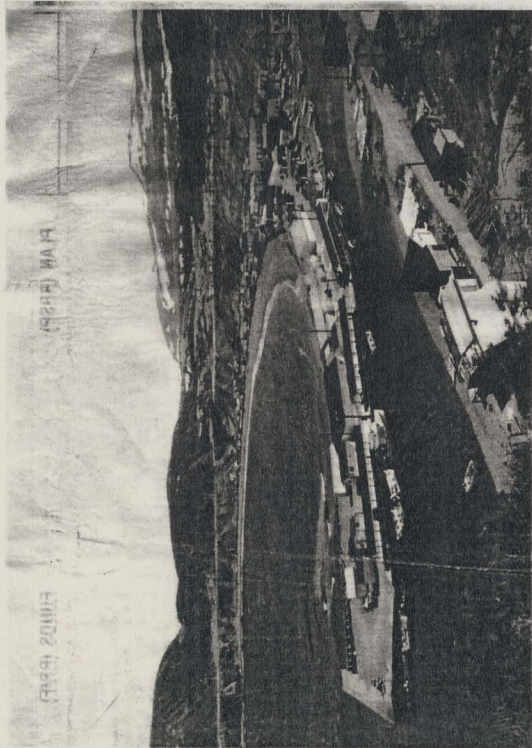
The earliest known white settler of the community, George Crocker of

**Figure 2.0**

Picture of Trout River, circa 1988, Western Star photo



Figure 2.0



Tina Brake, "Trout River: A Treasure of Natural Beauty," Western Star 23 Mar. 1988

Dorsetshire, England,<sup>2</sup> built his house close to the mouth of the river, and proceeded to raise a family there. Mr. Crocker came across and settled there in the early 1800s, and for almost fifty years he and his family were the only settlers. Church records show that in 1829 he married a woman by the name of Catherine Blanchard from the Bay of Islands area (Figure 2.1). She returned with him to the area and worked with her husband, and eventually their children, in the making of fish and cultivation of the land (Cuff 426).

Trout River was listed in the census of 1857 with a population of 13. By 1874, the population had doubled in size but it is likely that the only residents of the area at this time were Crockers and their spouses. After 1880 however, there is evidence that other families from the Southwest Coast also came to take up residence in Trout River. These included people with surnames such as Barnes, Hann, Parsons, and White (Cuff 426). By 1884 the population had risen to 108 and by 1901 it was up to 229 residents (“History of Bonne Bay and Trout River.” Decks Awash 23-24). Due to the success of the lobster fishery in the early 1900s, still others made the move from Bonne Bay into Trout River. This second major group of arrivals included families such as the Brakes, McLeans, Sheppards and Snooks (Cuff 426). Around this time there were approximately 18 lobster factories in Trout River. This abundance made it the centre for

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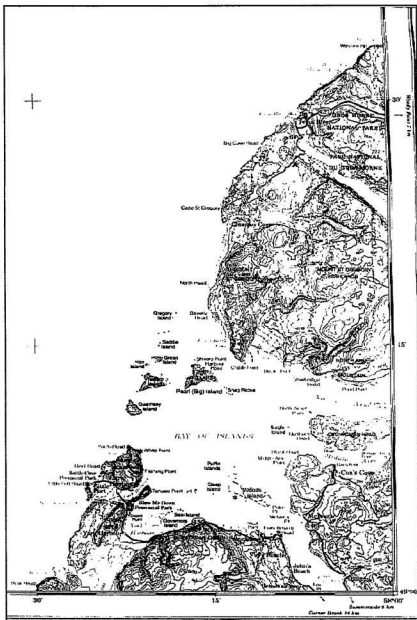
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There is some debate about the exact place from which Mr. Crocker originally came. Both John Mannion in his A Guide to Settlement in the Humber Valley and Bonne Bay and David Huddleston in The Trout River Legacy: Melding of French and English Cultures, indicate that he was from Dorset while History of Bonne Bay and Trout River in Decks Awash vol 17(4) indicates a starting point of Liverpool, England. The writer, through her own extensive research on the subject and family oral history, believes that the Dorset location is the most likely.

**Figure 2.1**

Map of the Bay of Islands Region, Department of Forestry

Figure 2.1



Map of the Bay of Islands area. Newfoundland Department of Crown Lands.

lobster production for the whole Bonne Bay area ("History of Bonne Bay and Trout River." Decks Awash 23-24).

As well as fishing the Crockers also did some trapping. At this time there was a merchant, John Bird, who had set up a trading station in Bonne Bay, probably in Woody Point. The furs garnered from their trapping activities were traded to obtain needed cloth, food, and tools. Bird's ledger also indicates that the original settler, Mr. Crocker engaged in salmon and trout fishing.<sup>3</sup>

Further information about this first settler and his family comes from the diaries of an early minister on the coast, a Bishop Feild. He notes:

Crocker has a good deal of land under cultivation .... His garden is well cultivated, and apparently he is in very comfortable circumstances, but grumbles like an Englishman, and declares he has a hard matter to keep his family (Cuff 426).

He also indicates that Mr. Crocker settled in Trout River around 1830 and grew crops of turnip and barley and kept such animals as pigs and sheep. The Crockers had nine children and according to the minister the family appeared well off.<sup>4</sup>

The community of Trout River was similar to other outposts along the coast with

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<sup>3</sup>

David Huddlestone, "The Trout River Legacy: Melding of French and English Cultures," Canoma 11:1 (1985): 22-24. Though not stated in this article the merchant operating in the Bonne Bay area at this time was Bird's of Poole from England as noted by John Mannion in A Guide to Settlement in the Humber Valley and Bonne Bay, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup>

Huddlestone 22-24. Although the article doesn't list the name of the visiting priest, the only account of any minister in the area at that time was Bishop Feild.

regards to its being chosen as a location for settlement. The abundance of ocean resources such as cod, salmon and trout was an attraction, as was the sizeable presence of shellfish, specifically lobster. Trees for building and burning were also readily available. However, like other early communities Trout River, due to its location at the bottom of a bay, was isolated from other communities along the coast, especially during the winter season. As Harold Horwood describes it:

The branch to Trout River climbs over a tableland that is undoubtedly the most desolate spot visited by any road on the island. It looks less like anything earthly than like the surface of the moon. Bare boulders lie everywhere, many of them pitted and brown, others of an unnatural, sulphurous hue. Stark mountains rise against the sky, with sharp and precipitous escarpments (Harold Horwood Newfoundland 39).

For many years, the only access to Trout River, Bonne Bay and the Bay of Islands was by boat, a situation made particularly difficult in winter. In winter, dog teams and horse-drawn sleds would be used to go through the 29 kilometre valley, also known as 'The Gulch'<sup>5</sup> to Woody Point where the mail would be retrieved and then delivered. This overland route into Trout River was a vast, open valley with the Serpentine Hills to the north and the Table Mountains to the south. Since Horwood's earlier description the landscape has changed only slightly. Today the forests have grown down from the Serpentine Hills all the way to the current road which runs through the centre of The Gulch (Figure 2.2). The other side of the road, however still retains the desolate barrenness as

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The word gulch in Trout River has the same meaning as the definition in the DNE, that is "a valley between hills; a depression permitting passage."

**Figure 2.2**

Picture of The Gulch from various sources

Figure 2.2



A view of the Gulch leading into Trout River. Photograph by author. 1992.



View of the Gulch as seen from the hill leading into Woody Point. Photograph by author. 1968.



well as the 'sulphurous hue' (Horwood Newfoundland 39) and the area remains treacherous. During winter storms the valley is susceptible to deep snowfalls and severe drifting and storms can, and have, suddenly blown up and made movement dangerous, sometimes impossible. Many stories are told of those early trips where people nearly perished and horses died in trying to make the trek through the shelter-less valley. There is one particularly well-known story in Trout River that I recall from my own childhood and the recollections of others in the community which I have related here.

The Trout River gulch is a valley that connects the community with Woody Point, its nearest neighbour. The valley is bordered on one side by the Table Mountains in the south and the Serpentine Hills in the north, with a single stream cutting through roughly parallel to the road. The valley composes the majority of the 29 kilometres between the towns and is subject to typical Newfoundland weather, particularly in winter when the storms become harsh indeed. There are many stories in Trout River about the trials and tribulations of people attempting to cross the desolate stretch in the freezing cold, zero visibility and driving snow that feels like sandpaper across the skin. However, there is one story that is known in the town by all the adult members and many of the younger people, and that is the one about Nurse Jakeman going through the gulch. The story goes as follows:

Back in the early 50s or 60s when the road that went through was still unpaved a nurse by the name of Audrey Jakeman worked in Trout River. At the time there was a young girl pregnant and near ready to deliver her child.

Unfortunately the nurse, though a midwife, realized that there

were complications which she might not be able to handle with only the minimal facilities available in the small town. So plans were made to bring the pregnant girl into Woody Point where they could then take the ferry across to Norris Point and the hospital there or go directly across the ice by sleigh.

When the day for action arrived the weather was very cold, but clear. However, despite the reasonable conditions the trip was postponed until three o'clock in the afternoon. When the party finally got under way it was comprised of the nurse, the young girl, her mother, 4 men of the community and three horses to pull them. One of these horses was remembered as belonging to Harold Crocker and was described as being a beautiful, long-legged, sleek and fast animal. Thus equipped they set out, but the going was tougher and the snow deeper than expected and they were making poor time. Near nightfall they were approaching a spot called Querysome Marsh when a storm blew up seemingly from nowhere. Driving wind and snow destroyed visibility and the temperature dropped even further. With the going already slowed the party's movement ground to a halt. In the life and death situation that ensued nurse Jakeman was recalled as having stood on the runners of the sleigh, shielding the girl from the wind and snow with her open coat, while the rest of the party sat around freezing in the blizzard.

Rescue came sometime between midnight and 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. By then people in Woody Point had realized that the group must have gotten caught in the blizzard and they went out to find them. But by then the damage had been done. In the deadly cold and the driving snow 2 of the horses had lost their lives, including the magnificent animal Harold Crocker had lent the party. Worse, the young girl had lost her child as well as a leg and part of a hand. Nurse Jakeman also suffered severe frostbite and eventually had to have her leg amputated. Later people speculated that maybe if they had taken 2 horses, or just the girl and a couple of men, they may have made it. The people did not forget, however. They remembered the courage of the nurse who risked her life and was willing to die for her patient, the same woman for whom Trout River's all grade school was named.

In 1951 a road, highway Route 431, was built through the centre of the valley and cars came onto the scene. This made transportation faster, safer and more efficient. The road remained somewhat rough, however, until 1973 when the area was upgraded for the

establishment of Gros Morne National Park (Cuff 426).

The storms that closed The Gulch also affected the seas to which Trout River was exposed. When gales blew up waves could send the water so far up onto the beach that the roads would be flooded and water would wash around the edges of the houses. Wisely people avoided the sea at times like this, pulling their boats high up on the beach and tying them on either to fish stores or the house itself. But sometimes tragedy was inevitable as one of my informants, Herb Barnes, relates:

\*We had a lot of boats drove around and sunk here.

I remember, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, schooners drove ashore -- some drove up around the cove -- only one I know drove ashore here -- that's the last one -- Dick's (*schooner*) bringin' freight, he went around the western point and that's the last time we saw him.

That's back 50 years ago. Fifty years ago this fall.

They all got drowned. A woman McCloud from here, her brother got drowned. He's (*Dick's*) two sons and him got drowned. Four of 'em.

Southeaster -- he was too stupid to listen.

They was in here takin' herring and that on board -- came a breeze -- strong southeaster -- too stupid to tie up inside -- first thing he knew it was swept out around The Point and beat up (Crocker #28).

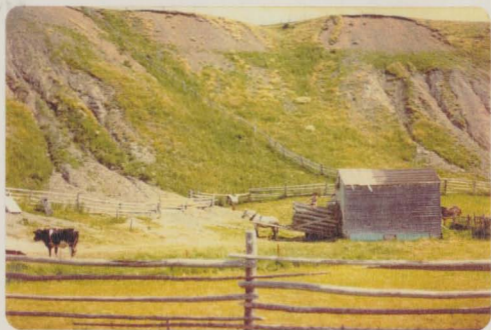
Despite these transportation difficulties the town grew and for a time flourished. The town's founder, George Crocker settled and built the family's house close to the mouth of the river, near where the wharf is today. When the others came later, they built their houses along the waterfront of Trout River Bay, which overlooked the long expanse of sandy beach where the early fishing boats could be hauled ashore. Eventually there were also dwellings established along the river itself although the space here where boats

could be launched or tied up was more limited. Expansion was impeded by the steep slope of the hill which separated the plateau from the beach. Thus, the inhabitants were forced to fill up the beach space or build up along the river. The steep slope at their back developed as a place to grow gardens, dig fish-smoking shacks and also to occasionally graze animals. An idea of this land use can be seen in **Figure 2.3**.

**Figure 2.3**

Picture of land use in Trout River. Notice the fences enclosing the entire property.

Figure 2.3



Fenced in areas at the base of the plateau, behind the houses. Photograph by author. 1968.



Fenced in backyards. Notice how the fencing runs all the way to the top of the plateau. Photograph by author. 1992.

Initially, the only religion in Trout River was the Church of England or Anglican Church. Later this changed, and the Salvation Army became a second popular denomination followed by the United Church. From my recollection these religious groups co-existed, even intermingled and I recall no stories of conflict between them. The cemeteries for both groups were located up on the plateau. There is a small graveyard located approximately in the middle of the beach, back close to the base of the plateau. This is where the old Anglican church once stood, and its graveyard was located directly behind it.

Throughout the 1900s the population of the community increased. By 1921, Trout River could boast a population of 404 residents. The population was so large that for the first time there were even one or two houses built up on top of the plateau. For a number of years, these were the only dwellings up 'on the hill', as the locals say. The lack of housing on the plateau probably related to the necessity of having the fishing boats pulled up on the sea shore near the houses. Living on the shore a boat owner could react faster to the ever-changing weather conditions, getting out to sea faster or even securing a boat before a nasty storm hit the beach. By 1935, the population had grown to 506 residents with the influx of settlers from Chimney Cove to the south, primarily Butlers and Paynes whose presence in that area was well established (Cuff 426).

With the continuing rise in the population, the need arose for some type of community centre in the area. In 1966, a Community Hall was built to seat approximately 100 people. A Community Council with 5 members was established at the same time as

the building was erected and also had offices in the building (Sunderland 10).

As indicated earlier, the development of Trout River first took place along the shoreline so that residents could gain access to the water for fishing purposes. Space was also available at the mouth of the river for the boats to tie up but the river then rapidly became shallow, limiting the possibility of mooring boats further up (Figure 2.4). Nonetheless the community still grew up along the river route, the fishermen travelling down by foot to their boats and stores. As the community grew, people built inland toward Trout River Pond where there was a cattle grazing area, situated roughly where the park area now has a campground. The pond area was well-forested allowing the residents access to fire wood and building materials. Today there is road development all along the river with lanes and streets branching off from the main road. Still, the focal point of the town remains the beach and the river mouth, the area originally developed in Trout River Bay.

Many of the buildings in the original town were used for storing fishing gear. With the lack of fishing currently these sheds are deteriorating and possibly in years to come may be taken down entirely with something new built in their place. Since the town will not likely be a strong and vibrant fishing community again, the new buildings will likely be directed towards the growing tourist trade.



**Figure 2.4**

2 pictures of boats tied up at the mouth of the river.

Figure 2.4



Fishing boats docked at the wharf in Trout River. Photograph by author. 1992.



A view of the mouth of the river and the area protected by the sand spit. Photograph by author. 1992.

## Section II. Marine Activity

Prior to 1901 the French migratory fishermen controlled the area from Cape Ray to Cape St. John, known as the French Shore, as a result of the Treaty of Versailles of 1783. As Huddleston notes,

To avoid the possibility of another war, the treaty allowed both the French and the English to catch and dry fish along the West Coast, but not to settle there permanently ... Some years later, many of the French returned to Europe and the English, as their population expanded, encroached on the forbidden coast (Huddleston 22-24).

Before the treaty considerable friction existed between the British and French, particularly over the salmon fishery. The French attempted to drive out or destroy the British settlers on what became known as the French Shore. Ultimately however, they failed and following the Napoleonic Wars the British resumed control of the salmon fishery on the West Coast and established enterprises in Bonne Bay after 1800. It is likely that the loss of the salmon fishery was much more detrimental to French interests than the loss of land upon which to settle. It is a situation noted by John Mannion who states, 'Because it is not a well sheltered harbour and because cod grounds nearby were never very productive, there is no record of French occupancy here...' (Mannion Guide to Settlement 8).

For the people of Trout River the sea was the primary resource and defining feature of their lives. Although other occupations existed the experience of the townspeople was one dominated by the fishery, its many seasons and its economic fluctuations. This is especially evident with the arrival of the cod moratorium in the early

1990s, which resulted in the majority of the people indefinitely unemployed. However, the sea was and is a diverse resource and the people of Trout River pursued several different types of fisheries, each of which offered varying degrees of sustenance to the settlers.

#### **A. The Salmon Fishery**

Through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sources indicate that the chief commercial commodity in Trout River and the Bonne Bay area was salmon, even though yields varied significantly. As a fishery salmon required less input of labour and capital than cod, and thus it had a distinct commercial appeal to British migratory fishermen. It was this profitable situation that prompted the British to begin settling in the remote areas of the western shore in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries despite the French Shore situation noted previously. Like other fishermen around Newfoundland those on the West Coast settled where they had the best access to the stocks from which they made their living. In the Bonne Bay region the fishermen settled near the mouths of the rivers, often ones frequented by salmon. This was true for Trout River as well, where the original settler, George Crocker built his home on the section of the beach closest to the river. From there he, like other salmon fishermen, could easily string nets across the mouth of the river and with small effort reap large rewards.

According to the records of the Bird mercantile enterprise the average summer catch in the early 1820s was 160 tierces<sup>6</sup>. Twenty years later the catch was less than half of that. But as John Mannion notes:

Despite the decline, salmon was still the most valuable commodity collected by Bird. Six settlers delivered 100 pounds (British currency) worth of salmon to the company in 1840, less than 1/5 the traditional amount, but still exceeding the combined value of oil and cod delivered by 14 dealers (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 244).

The value of the salmon fishery was highlighted following the Napoleonic Wars when the French renewed efforts to drive the English settlers from the French Shore. They went so far in one case as to appropriate a merchant's station in Bonne Bay in 1821. An appeal by Bird's company was supported by the British government however, and the French returned it without further contest. In fact French naval authorities began granting exclusive right to rivers and sanctioning the transmission of those rights to heirs. This resulted in difficulties between potential heirs later, but there is little evidence of direct French involvement in the salmon fishery after 1840 (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 245).

At about this time the salmon fishery began to decline due to over-fishing and lack of conservation. The practices of putting nets or wooden racks across river mouths and building dams with traps at both ends often prevented salmon from reaching the spawning grounds. Regardless of the fishermen's practices however, the yield from St. George's

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The DNE defines a tierce as, "a wooden container of designated size for the export of fish," and "... shall contain three hundred pounds of fish."

Bay, for example stayed around 200 - 250 tierces per season. We can assume that the people of Trout River also did well during this period, because of the number of fertile locations in the Bay of Islands, such as the Humber River, near the river mouths of Middle and North Arm and in Bonne Bay at the mouth of the bay and the East Arm (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 245). Many of these were places that the people of Trout River fished. This was offset somewhat at the time by the rise of the herring fishery, which will be covered later. Unfortunately the final effect is one well described by Moses Harvey as he notes the reason for the declining salmon stocks: 'Human ignorance and greed of immediate gain have wasted and partially destroyed what might be at this time, one of the most valuable resources of the colony.' (Harvey 58)

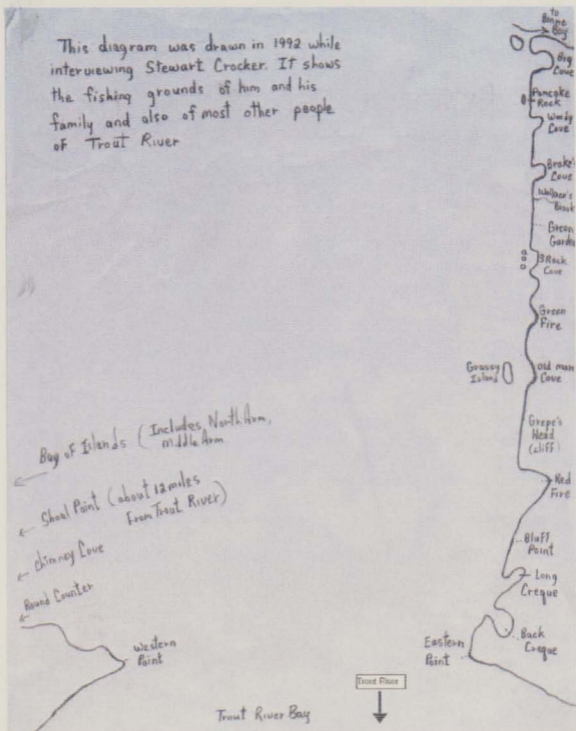
It is necessary to consider at this time the effect the demands of the fishery, especially the migratory fishery, had on the people involved in it. Oral tradition indicates that many fishermen from Trout River, and sometimes their families, would migrate to particular areas each summer either in the pursuit of salmon, or of lobster or of cod. Many of these migratory locations were traditional, often used year after year by the same families in Trout River. An illustration of some of these traditional fishing spots can be seen in **Figure 2.5**. It was a difficult activity for the fishing families especially after education became a factor. In fact, some children would be taken out of school in May to accompany their parents to these areas to the detriment of their academic pursuits.

As mentioned the fishery tended to involve the whole family, a fact confirmed when I spoke to George Crocker in the summer of 1992. George was one of my

**Figure 2.5**

A hand drawn diagram of the fishing spots near Trout River that people migrated to.

Figure 2.5



Hand drawn map of the fishing spots near Trout River. Drawing by author. 1992.



younger informants, only about 40 years old but still of an age to have been involved in this practice of migratory fishing. Other older men and women had also reported that they had not received much schooling because they had to go into the fishery at a young age. Unfortunately, as wage earners for the families they often never returned to actually finish school and graduate. By the mid 1950s people began to see the changes taking place in the world and realized that schooling was important. George had this to say about the situation:

\*Dad and Grandfather would go up in April (to Shoal Point) when the lobster season opened, then when school would close we'd go up, sometimes before school would close. Mom would take the smaller youngsters and go on, say when we were 12, 13, 14. We'd have to stay in school. Mom would take the younger ones and go on. They didn't used to bother about taking the younger ones out of school (Crocker #19).

So things were changing. George's mother went to Shoal Point to provide more stability and comfort closer to the fishing grounds while her husband fished. She would wash clothes, cook meals, take care of animals, and gardens as generations of people before had done. Unlike before however, the older children would stay at home in Trout River until the school year was finished in mid-June when they too would join their parents for the summer.

## B. The Herring Fishery

With the decline of the salmon stocks during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more emphasis was put on the growing herring fishery. This fishery was initially prosecuted in the spring and autumn but soon there developed a very viable winter fishery as well. This herring fishery continues to be one of the principal industries of Newfoundland and is carried out chiefly on the West Coast. Mainly the fish were used as bait for the trawl<sup>7</sup> lines, ie. long lines covered with hooks and baited to catch other, larger fish species. This herring was exported primarily to Nova Scotia and the New England states. Other herring, those destined for human consumption, usually took the form of smoked or pickled herring and also became a significant export.

The oldest informant that I spoke with was Herb Barnes who was 87 years old at the time of the interview. I asked him about catching herring, specifically about whether they packed herring in Trout River. Herb said:

\*Pack herring? Oh that was our main thing. In the spring, spring herring, then you'd wait to the fall and you'd go at the herring fishery. What we used to call the herring fishery. We'd pack a lot of herring then. Big sale for them. They'd take it all from poor people. But you'd have to put up number one fish. You'd have to look after it just so, for the inspector.

They'd do it up in 200 lb barrels (Crocker #28).

Most fish was put in barrels at that time except for lobster, which was packed in

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7

The DNE defines a trawl as, "a buoyed line, of great length, to which short lines with baited hooks are attached at intervals."

half-pound tins and one-pound tins, and cod, which was usually dried.

\*Dry all the fish, clean the -- that's codfish, they'd all be dried -- the other kind they'd put up in barrels -- like you'd have to put it up good or you wouldn't sell it -- all that was bought by Parkers then, in Halifax -- sometimes the United States would come down and buy it. You'd get a little better then.

Schooners would come into the bay - Trout River, that's 50 years ago- they would come to pick up herring. Dick's was one (Crocker #28).

Unlike the fishery in St. George's Bay, the herring fishery of the Bonne Bay area, which included Trout River, developed later in the century and more rapidly. In Trout River the herring could be caught in great quantities through the ice in the arms of the bays, as well as in the open water during non-winter months. It was due to this winter access however, that the summer fishermen of Labrador began to settle in the St. George's Bay and Bonne Bay areas. This fishery's winter season went from January to March, while the open water season was in October and November. The combination of the demand of American markets and the banking vessels substantially increased the pressure on the species after 1860. In the Bay of Islands at that time the yields grew to 50 000- 60 000 barrels annually (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 250).

As a result of this boom in the herring fishery many applications for land grants were made to the governor at the time. By 1870 the herring fishery was considered to be the chief support of the people of Trout River. At that time the settlers moved seasonally around the inlets and bays, pursuing the migratory herring. Unfortunately the herring migrations were extremely complex and could be very uncertain. As a result between

1877 and 1884 the stocks suffered a sharp drop and families who depended on them were forced on relief. Some settlers even began to leave the area. However, toward the end of the century the herring did return to the West Coast and with them a level of prosperity. With the coming of the railway the delivery of herring-on-ice to Canadian and American markets became possible. Also about this time the art of barrel-making became widespread due to the fact that much of the herring was now being sent fresh (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 250-251).

According to the account of a resident of the area in the 1970s, many men from Trout River worked at a herring store in Woody Point with other men from the Bonne Bay area. They travelled the 29 kilometres through the valley by bus each day simply to get to work. Due to the seasonal nature of the fishery the men worked seven-day work weeks until the herring was exhausted perhaps for some months. The men would begin work each day at 7 o'clock in the morning and return home after 5 o'clock in the evening each day. As the work could be done best in daylight it was necessary to work long ten-hour days in those already long work weeks. Of the herring produced, some was salted while others were pickled in barrels, each product being then sent to the appropriate export markets (Hann 8). The herring store closed in the late 1970s. Since then men from Trout River have depended on work programs and local initiative projects to keep them off welfare (Hann 18).

The importance of the herring fishery was outlined by a group of Trout River students in an account published by Western Publishing Co. Ltd. in 1946. It states:

The herring fishery is one of the principal industries of Nfld and is carried out chiefly on the West Coast. They appear mostly in the spring and autumn. The autumn catch is especially important. 25-30 boats leave Trout River equipped with nets, warm clothing, lines, and dories. Huge sums of money are spent by crews, \$800 - \$1500 spent on fishing material. There are others who leave Trout River to package herring. The fishing stores in the Bay of Islands invest great money in barrels, employers, and food. The largest part is exported, bringing financial income to Nfld (Salvation Army School Students 12).

### **C. The Lobster Fishery**

Though it is odd to think of it as such lobster was at one time used as bait by the French who once fished the western shore. Towards the end of the 1800s however, it became a part of people's diets and this signalled its beginning as a serious fishery. The summer fishery for lobster was prosecuted between May and July and canning of lobster was recorded in the Bay of Islands region as early as 1856. By 1880, the lobster fishery was commercially sound, and the industry developed rapidly on the West Coast. There, and on the Northern Peninsula canning factories began to appear and by 1887 there were 76 canneries employing 700 people. The fishermen of Trout River added their lobster to the supply going into the Rocky Harbour canneries, which were likely the closest at hand for them. In order to utilize the lobster fishery to its fullest potential, the government assigned certain sections of the coast to merchants (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 251). These merchants supplied the fishermen with the gear to prosecute the fishery and hired local labour to process the catch. Women and children were often involved in this

processing of the lobster. Gradually, a multitude of family operated factories appeared along the west and north coasts. The extensive preparation which the lobster fishery required resulted in winter employment in the making of pots or traps and wooden packing cases, which can be seen in the lower photograph of **Figure 2.6**. As well, the employment included the building of the lobster factories themselves. At that time the growth of the industry came as a welcome reprieve for many families who were destitute due to the decline in the cod and herring fisheries.

This growth also fuelled another influx of labour into the new industry and in some outports, such as Trout River the population began to rise in conjunction with the expansion of the lobster fishery. In 1891, the lobster yield on the West Coast was 10,000 cases of lobster (about 200 lobsters per case) packed and exported. High yields came from Trout River, Lark Harbour, and Chimney Cove, which were all well involved in the fishery by now (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 251-252). The people of Trout River did a great deal of their fishing from other locales as well, most notably Chimney Cove and Shoal Point. While fishing from those spots it seems that they would build a sort of 'cabin' in which they could reside for the several months of the season. Such movements meant more accessibility to the lobster grounds and thus a more effective use of their efforts, and hopefully, a greater yield. John Omohundro describes how many outports on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland practised transhumance as part of their adaptive strategy. Main Brookers moved to look for better timber stands while the people of Trout River followed the fish (Omohundro 22). But, as is the case

**Figure 2.6**

2 pictures, one of fishing nets piled up after use, the other of lobster pots waiting to be used.

Figure 2.6



Shot of the wharf and the nets waiting for use. Photograph by author. 1992.



Lobster pots waiting for use in the Lobster fishery. Photograph by author. 1968.



with most fisheries, the yield fluctuated, and the next decade saw a decline in the stocks. As Moses Harvey notes regarding the situation, 'Overfishing and the capture of immature lobsters are the cause of the decline' (Harvey 8). The situation was further complicated by the friction that developed between cod fishermen and lobster fishermen as they shared the same fishing grounds. The cod fishermen claimed that lobster was their traditional form of bait, while the lobster fishermen wanted the now valuable commodity as a catch in its own right. Eventually however, the commercial lobster fishermen were able to convince the cod fishermen that the lobster fishery was so lucrative that they too could enter the industry (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 252).

Once the fishermen had a load of lobster they would bring the carrying crates to the 'pool': a central holding area that was located in Rocky Harbour. The fishermen doing this would be said to be 'smackin' lobster' and the boat that took the lobsters to the pool was known as the 'smack<sup>8</sup>'. The fishermen were told that when the box or crate, a wooden box approximately 2x3x1 feet, was full this would indicate 100 lbs. of lobster. The crates were not weighed by the fishermen. Once the crates were brought to Rocky Harbour a buyer would then take them and 're-pack' them in other crates before he sent them to merchants on the mainland. Bert McLean tells this story:

\*They would make the crates a certain size and they -- would say

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In Trout River the smack was simply the boat used to take the lobsters, after they were collected, to the merchant in Rocky Harbor. The DNE also states that a smack is a boat of a specific design that has a well for keeping fish alive in. As far as the author understands the people of Trout River did not use a specialized vessel design for the harvesting or transporting of lobster.

each one was 100lbs and we, foolish like, would listen to them. Then the smack was comin' and he would be usin' his boat - - there could be 100lbs or 150lbs. But he would only get so much for a crate - - and he wouldn't be gettin' paid - - nothing for his boat nothing weighed.

They (*the smack*) would take the lobsters to Rocky Harbour and bring back the empty crate. They would still use the same crates, but now they are weighed they are weighed on the boat, too.

We lost out a lot just the same (Crocker # 25).

This exemplifies how the fishermen were often 'taken advantage of' by the buyers and the merchants.

With developments in transportation technology the exporting of live lobsters became possible and a new source of revenue became available to the fishermen. These developments began in the late forties and early fifties and the new commodity is still popular today. With the growing demand for live lobsters the canning industry was reduced and eventually disappeared entirely.

#### **D. The Cod Fishery**

In the files of The Western Star of October 28, 1949 the Honourable Ray Petten of Bonavista, a new member of the Canadian Senate, is recalled as having made these comments in an address to the House of Commons:

Senator Petten reminded his colleagues that it was the salt fish industry which had been the reason for the colonization of the oldest colony of the British Crown, in the first place, and that phase of the fisheries remains the most important factor of its economy. . .  
... From this, the youthful senator went on to deal with the curing of the fish, and the need to modernize this phase of the industry, which was in

many localities is conducted just as it was generations ago. ("News of the Fisheries." Western Star 23).

The image of the sea 'teeming with codfish' was conveyed to Europe by the discoverer John Cabot in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It became the impetus for the colonization of the east and south coasts of Newfoundland. The phenomenon is described as follows in the pages of National Geographic:

Only four years after Columbus's epic discovery, Henry VII of England granted a patent to 'our well beloved John Gabote, citizen of Venice,' to sail on a voyage of exploration. One of Cabot's prizes: fish.

In August of 1497 Cabot came home with tales of a place where fish were so thick he took his plenty simply by lowering weighted baskets. King Henry called it a 'new founde lande.' The Italian navigator had found the shallow waters of Newfoundland's Grand Banks, still a rich source of cod, haddock, and other bottom fish.

Skippers from England, Portugal, France and Spain soon followed Cabot, catching cod and salting and drying them on the New World's rocky shores. Thus, foreign fishermen have been sailing to North America's continental shelf since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later, Canadians and Americans joined them in fishing these rich waters (Marden 515).

Trout River, however, is not a part of this romantic saga for it was not settled until the 1800s and it was salmon, lobster and herring that initially attracted people to the area.

During the mid and later 1800s when salmon, lobster and herring were a large part of the export market, cod was not, at least not on the West Coast. It was only as a reaction to the uncertainty of the herring migrations that settlers in the 1860s looked to the cod fishery (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 246). The underdevelopment of the cod fishery is attributable to a number of factors. The first of these was the profitability of other fish species, and the second, competition for cod from schooners from

Newfoundland's south coast, Nova Scotia, New England and France. A third factor was the distance between the settlements and the most fertile cod fishing grounds, which were located around the islands and headlands at the mouth of the Bay of Islands.

As Trout River expanded in the 1900s and people began moving into the cod fishery, transhumance increased. This movement of fishermen closer to the summer cod fishing grounds was sometimes even joined by all or part of their families, in order to help in the landside processing of the fish. Eventually, permanent and semi-permanent settlements were established on the site of the temporary dwellings and the average catch of 2000 quintals<sup>9</sup> in the mid-1860s increased to 3000 just ten years later and reached a peak of 10,000 by 1884 (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 246). Still, throughout the 19th century it was the distance from Trout River to the fishing grounds that was thought to be the principal factor for the sluggish growth rate of the cod fishery.

In the Bonne Bay region it was Rocky Harbour and Trout River that were the main producers of cod. However, in the 1850s it was considered a secondary commodity in comparison to lobster. About this time larger vessels allowed for the expansion of the cod fishery to the St. John's and Labrador areas. This in turn led to an increase in the size of the cod catch. Eventually there was a gradual centralization of the cod fishery in the Trout River area, much as there had been in the Bay of Islands previously (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 246). During this time cod was dried on

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<sup>9</sup>

The DNE lists a quintal as being a unit of measurement for cod fish of a weight of 112 lbs, or 50.8 kg.

fish flakes as the method of choice for preserving (Figure 2.7 and 2.8). It is interesting to note that the Argin' Ground itself was located next to the fish flakes<sup>10</sup>, on which cod were dried and which extended all the way along the beach. The spreading of fish also presented an opportunity for enterprising children to make some money. One story that I especially liked was told by Alex White who as a young boy would get into so-called harmless mischief.

\*We would go down and steal from Charlie Butt and then go back and sell it to him!

I remember Uncle Jess Crocker - - and Aunt Lil she goin' and singin' - - with her hands fold up in her apron - - goin' out to turn fish over or just spreadin' it out - - we used to go down and get in under the flake - - and listen to her - - and she'd put a big one - - a nice size down - - we'd reach up and haul it down through (the flake) - - and when she'd come back she wouldn't miss that fish gone - - she would put another one there to replace it.

I guarantee you we wouldn't no good crowd (Crocker #29).

During the mid twentieth century, the cod fishery was often the only occupation for many people in northern and western Newfoundland. During that time the majority of cod was caught in an inshore fishery employing traps, gill nets and hand lines. Much of the fish at this time was preserved by salting, a task that fell to the women and younger members of the household (Felt, Sinclair 10).

In the 1960s the homogeneous social structure of the fishery began to break down. The old techniques used by fishermen provided only a meagre standard of living.

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<sup>10</sup>

The DNE defines a flake as, "A platform built on poles and spread with boughs for drying cod fish on the foreshore." This definition is adequate for the flakes used in Trout River, and used for the same purpose.

**Figure 2.7**

Women standing on fish flakes in Trout River.

Figure 2.7



Women standing on fish flakes in Trout River. Photograph by Verna Barrett. 1959.

**Figure 2.8**

A view of fish on the flakes drying.



Figure 2.8



A view of fish on the flakes drying. Horwood, Harold and Stephen Taylor. *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976. 99.

In response the few fishermen who were committed to staying in the fishery experimented with the use of larger vessels known as 'longliners'. This was the case in Trout River as well. Initially, the fishermen started off with homemade vessels as had traditionally been the case. However, as time progressed fishermen sought the apparently superior commercially built vessels, the newest of which were known as draggers. The emergence of draggers in the fishing industry gave fishermen more flexibility and extended the effective fishing season, which in turn led to an even more complex industry. The draggers also proved successful in the harvest of shrimp as well as cod in the late 1970s. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the draggers proved particularly effective at their tasks. As Lawrence F. Felt and Peter R. Sinclair observe:

The most frequent defence against abolition of the local dragger fleet is the fact that without them the fish plants would close and the region's economy collapse. Although the present inability of fixed-gear fishers to supply the fish plants adequately may only be the result of the draggers and the decimated state of the cod stocks, the current dependence of fish plants on the dragger fleet is unquestioned (Felt, Sinclair 63).

The mid 1970s brought increased conflict in the fishing industry between local dragger fleets and what were known as 'fixed-gear fishermen'. It was believed, perhaps correctly, that the draggers were taking in such large amounts of fish that they eventually caused a decline in fish stocks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The response of the dragger fleet to the evidence of decline in the stock was to place "liners" in their nets. Using a liner involves placing another layer of net into the cod end (the section of the net where fish are trapped) in order to reduce the mesh size and retain more of the smaller fish. One dragger fisher explained "People took what they call the 'belly'- the same size mesh- and just put in their net and leave it in and let

it fall back through so it criss-crossed the cod end.” Although a few skippers may have used liners previously, the mid- 1980’s saw a dramatic increase in this practice (Palmer, Sinclair 42-43).

In 1976 the government brought in limited entry licensing to prevent the over-exploitation of cod stocks. This practice restricted the number of druggers that could operate in the fishery in a particular area, such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence where the Trout River boats fished. However, it was felt by many that the government was doing little to control illegal fishing which also contributed to the dramatic decline in fish stocks (Felt, Sinclair 59). The use of ‘an otter trawl net is felt to damage the ocean bottom, drive fish from an area, and catch undersized cod that are either sold or dumped at sea’ (Felt, Sinclair 60).

Whether or not foreign overfishing is primarily to blame for the collapse of the cod stocks is still an unresolved quarrel. Unreported catches, domestic overfishing, over-efficient technology, dumping of undersized fish or unwanted species, the growth in the seal population after the banning of the seal hunt (as one of Newfoundland’s politicians noted, the seals weren’t lining up at Mary Brown’s for takeout), even a drop in sea water temperature have all been raised as factors (Sorensen 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 57).

The decline in fish stocks also led to changes in the fish processing industry and this development was observed in Trout River.

During this time, an agent for the Canadian Saltfish Corporation (Franklyn Crocker) was upset about the fish processing system currently in place. The Corporation was a Crown Company established in 1970 to promote the sale of saltfish (Maloney 70). The problem was that the fish which were being caught in Trout River were being sent to

a buyer for Fishery Products in Norris Point because they were able to offer a higher price per pound for the codfish, which the Saltfish Corporation couldn't match. From there the fish would be sent on to St. Anthony for processing. The Saltfish Corporation in Trout River was placed in an uncompetitive situation as they found it difficult to market small salt fish, the average size of which was 12 to 18 inches ("Trout River - Fishery Frustrations" Decks Awash 10-11).

In addition to the difficulty of being in an uncompetitive situation in terms of marketing their catch, the fishermen of Trout River were also at a disadvantage due to the poor condition of their wharf's apron. As the Apron was not paved it was difficult to keep clean and it made keeping the flies away an impossible task ("Trout River - Fishery Frustrations" Decks Awash 10-11). A concrete apron, like the one installed, could be sprayed down regularly to remove the organic material that was the flies' main breeding ground. This was important because the flies could also land on fresh fish and lay eggs, which might then hatch into maggots which could spoil an entire load of fish. So, with the market tending more and more towards fresh fish such steps had to be taken in order for Trout River to remain in the industry, in the face of increasing government sanitation regulations. These new techniques had an additional impact upon the labour market. Whereas in the past, most of the fish caught were processed, dried and salted by household labour, 'the drying and salting of fish has been almost entirely replaced by fresh- fish filleting, and in some plants skinning, deboning and deworming' (Felt, Sinclair 63). The new processing methods were much less labour intensive and so provided

fewer jobs. This change in techniques and the reason for it are documented by David Sorensen:

The big change, of course, happened after Confederation with the switch to fresh, frozen fish," said Dr. Ryan. "From the time of Cabot until the 1930's, the production of fish pretty well hadn't changed. Processing was light salting and natural drying."<sup>11</sup>

It was only after Confederation, when Newfoundland attached itself to the United States (Canada's traditional trading partner) who preferred its fish frozen, that production changed. The result of the change was felt in Newfoundland. Fishing changed from a family-oriented business to a larger scale commercial enterprise with fish plants that employed men and women in specific tasks. This contributed to the growth of some villages into much larger towns (Sorensen 500 Years 20).

The decline in the need for labour foreshadowed the decline in the fishery that had already started by the 1980s. This decline threatened even further the economic viability of many Newfoundland communities, Trout River included.

In addition to those fisheries who adopted dragger technology, many continued to operate small boats and to fish lobster, salmon and cod, while others persisted with a gill-net longliner operation. Indeed, scattered along the coast from Trout River in the south to Cook's Harbour in the north, 2 917 residents held fishing licenses and almost exactly half of these worked full-time at the fishery (calculated from the data supplied by the DFO, St. John's) (Palmer, Sinclair 29).

The use of draggers had been encouraged in the late 1980s and early 1990s because, without them fish plants would close and the local economies would collapse totally. However, this had the effect of severely depleting the amount of fish available for other fishermen who did not possess the same level of technology. These fishermen were

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The person Sorensen is quoting here is Dr. Shannon Ryan, a History professor from Memorial University of Newfoundland.

forced to move into other fisheries to survive, particularly lobster. For this reason, 'Lobster and salmon licenses, sometimes held in combination, were extremely important, particularly on the southern part of the coast' (Palmer, Sinclair 29).

One of the improvements attributed to Newfoundland's joining Confederation was the introduction of unemployment insurance. This subsidized the fishermen during the slow periods between fishing seasons, adding an increased degree of economic stability. Unfortunately, with the serious reduction in work the minimum requirement for the Unemployment Insurance Program of the time, which was ten weeks of full-time work, became for many hard to come by. This was brought on by the lack of fish and the new, more efficient techniques of processing it. In Trout River many fishermen found it necessary to adopt a three-step strategy for earning a living. The first few weeks of the winter fishery were spent catching lobster, caplin, and salmon with lobster being by far the most plentiful. Mid-summer brought a few weeks in the cod fishery, at one time the main fishery but now at best uncertain. The remaining time necessary to fulfill the Unemployment Insurance's ten week requirement, when necessary was spent in the Labrador fishery or in landside employment such as logging. However, by 1991 the Labrador fishery had itself declined to the point that it was not even lucrative enough to warrant travelling any longer. It was a situation whose gravity Sorensen describes well:

The loss of the fishery was not just a social and economic and ecological disaster, but an impossible-to-believe one. Newfoundland had been discovered because of fish and settled for fish and survived on fish, and now the fish were gone (Sorensen 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 57).

It was this intensifying situation that led to the 'riot' at DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) offices in Port- aux- Basques in March of 1991. There, a combined alliance of fish plant workers, dragger fishers and out-of-town buyers convened, 'because all were suffering from the fact that the Winter Fishery had been effectively closed by a combination of factors' (Felt, Sinclair 71).

Many residents had to rely on 'make-work' projects or had to leave for the mainland to find work or depend on 'social assistance' or 'welfare' (Felt, Sinclair 66-67). Many residents of Trout River found themselves in this position as time progressed as well. According to James P. Feehan's analysis of Carol Brice-Bennett's report on the state of the Labrador Coast Fishery:

The failure of the 1990 fishery and the even more disastrous 1992 fishery severely disturbed this equilibrium. Sufficient employment to qualify for UI eluded many and caused a major increase in those seeking social assistance, while those who did fish or were otherwise employed suffered enormous drops in earned incomes. The 1992 announcement of the Northern Cod Moratorium means that this disruption will be long-lasting (Feehan 196).

As in the 1960s, for many residents being on social assistance provided more income than they could earn if they were employed for a few weeks during the year (Wadel 67). Accordingly many residents settled for this method of survival in order to ensure they had food on the table. The eventual closure of the fishery in 1992 to allow the cod stocks to mature has led to a permanent atmosphere of economic uncertainty. This is particularly the case with a small outport such as Trout River, where the diversity and

profitability of non-maritime occupations is negligible.

As quoted by Feehan, Carol Brice-Bennett's report notes:

Those who stay will continue to acquire little in the way of education and training, while those who seek to leave will try to acquire the skills needed for mobility. That outcome is, disappointingly, the most likely prospect (Feehan 199).

The cod moratorium affected Newfoundlanders on every part of the island, in much the same way. As Bob Price, a fisherman from Brunette Island points out,

One thing we do know, the moratorium had to come. We just couldn't go on the way we was going, not the fisheries. Something had to happen. Technology was doing it. They bringing in all that technology. When it got up in the 80s when everything started to boom you was seeing what was on the ocean floor. This is what brought on the moratorium, and ruined the fish (Woodrow, Ennis 108).

A similar account from a fisherman in West St. Modeste, Labrador tells the role technology played in destroying the fishery.

With all the technology around these days, my God, you can catch all kinds of fish with trawl. You don't even have to bait it. Now its baited automatically. It's a different technology. It's helping the human work, I guess (Woodrow, Ennis 18).

In addition to those quoted here, there were hundreds of fishermen who saw it coming. Most had noticed a continual decline in their traditional stocks, even in Trout River. However, instead of anticipating government restriction and conservation most looked for new methods of acquiring the fish they needed. This led fishermen to use any means possible to continue to support their families with the only work they knew, fishing. Fishermen began to use liners in their nets to haul smaller sized cod and other species off



the ocean floor that previously had not been harvested. Suddenly, markets grew for underdeveloped species and before they knew it the fishermen were, and now are facing the same problem that occurred with the cod fish. The result of the growing desperation is illustrated by John Kelloway, a fisherman from Wesleyville, who sums it up as follows:

But since the moratorium, everybody is hitting lobster hard. They hit lump fish hard. They hit the black back hard. Every other species is getting a killing while they're waiting for another species to rebound (Woodrow, Ennis 77).

But slowly Newfoundlanders are learning the balance necessary, as Michael Harris notes:

Cabot Martin, one of the first people to warn about the destruction of the northern cod stock in the early 1980s, summed up the future for Newfoundland when he said, "We have for far too long blamed our weather, our location, or others for our problems. It's about time we took a long, hard look in the mirror. No society can escape the responsibility for how it lives. And it is in that basic, fundamental way that gaining power over our fisheries is the first essential step to growing up (Harris 334).

The moratorium was a topic that invariably came up in conversation during the summer of 1992 when I was conducting most of my research. The government had only closed part of the Newfoundland cod fishery, and at that time it did not include the West Coast. People in the area felt that it should have been closed all around the island. One evening I spoke to Mona and Bert McLean and Mona offered her thoughts on what had happened to the fish:

*\*(Mona) The government came in and all these longliners and draggers on - - that's a clean sweep. These boats destroy everything. (Her husband, Bert agreed and went on to elaborate)*

*(Bert)* They would seine<sup>12</sup> in the spring, in spawning time -- they done it all. They are at the herring 'til the drift ice comes -- they got to stop then. Then the spring they are at the herring; then they are at the caplin. The caplin brings the fish in; then they gets at the mackerel. They're cleanin' her, them big boats -- they're makin' a pile of money.

*(Bert)* One time you could set your trawl and before your trawl was down there was thousands. Now is no good to set a trawl -- perhaps you'd get -- nare one.

*(Bert)* They can almost go around these waters anytime at all -- them big boats.

*(Bert)* The factory ships -- they're like cities -- all lit up at night some of them as big as islands (Crocker #26).

Eventually a number of programs were introduced to support the fishermen, who no longer could provide a livelihood for themselves from the cod fishery. From the AFAP (Atlantic Fisheries Adjustment Package), to TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy) to the Northern Cod Adjustment and Recovery Program, billions of dollars were spent by the federal government to support the fishermen who were dealt a deadly blow with the closure of the fishery in 1992. This situation still exists and continues to draw large amounts of revenue from the governments coffers. FPI president Vic Young correctly observed at the time the moratorium was announced, 'The Moratorium will change the economic landscape of Newfoundland for as long as it lasts' (Sorensen 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 58).

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<sup>12</sup>

In Trout River a seine was a net, like the description given in the DNE, "A large vertical net placed in position around a school of fish, the 'foots' drawn together to form a bag, and hauled at sea or in shallow water near the shore." The word appears to be applicable as either a noun or a verb.

### Section III. Landside Activity

While the fishery provided the settlers of Trout River with some degree of stability, it was not the only sphere of economic activity. Most settlers sought to exploit the resources that were immediately at hand, and there were those who were forced at least temporarily from their permanent homes to explore distant resources. While it was not possible to exploit all available resources at once, no one resource was substantial enough to keep a family supported for the whole year:

Survival through the long harsh winters, with the coast ice bound from December until June, was made possible through wood cutting, hunting, gardening, spring sealing, and more recently, unemployment insurance compensation (UIC) (Felt, Sinclair 59).

This pattern of 'occupational pluralism'<sup>13</sup> is depicted as follows in the testimony of one particular informant, Brazil Brake:

\*I sailed for 11 years. First I was on the Denmo lugging lobsters up to PEI. Used to make 10-11 trips a year. Then we used to go up to Pictou with some and Halifax with some. First I went as a deck hand.

The next one I got on I was cook. We usually made a trip a week. We'd take lobsters up and usually we would bring back a load of vegetables, turnips, potatoes, stuff like that. Mostly to Corner Brook.

We carried coal too, after the lobster season was over. We knocked off that, we would carry coal then 'till the herring fishery started in the fall, then we'd go at the herring. Dunphy's had a seiner too

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13

An aspect of economic pluralism, occupational pluralism relates to the varied cyclical pattern of work in primarily non-cash based, subsistence economies. In Trout River most of the economic exchange was done by trade or barter, from land and supplies, to livestock and fish. The actual cash on hand in the community was generally very small until the economic and technological boom that followed the post World War II years. See John Mannion, Point Lance in Transition: The Transformation of a Newfoundland Outport (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976) 46.

(Crocker #3).

The various other occupations the residents participated in usually took the form of one or more of the following: trapping and fur trading, timber, agriculture and animal husbandry, mineral extraction and canning.

#### **A. Trapping and Fur Trading**

One winter activity that became prevalent was trapping. This can be inferred from the frequent references made in Bird's Ledger to the trapping of such animals as beaver, red fox, black and silver fox, lynx, otter, marten and muskrat (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 245). Although there is no specific detail as to the species that were hunted in Trout River during its early years, we can assume trappers in this area would have hunted for the game, which was common to the Bonne Bay region as a whole.

In Trout River trapping for the purposes of food was common from the community's inception until the arrival of the park in 1973. This differs from trapping done for the purpose of trading, as indicated in Bird's ledger for the Bonne Bay station. Trapping had been a profitable venture for Bird before 1840, after which prices declined steadily. Bird's ledger records that he notified his Bonne Bay agent to cut off ties with furriers for reasons of simple economics, with current fur prices they had accumulated too

great a debt with their rising credit lines (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 256). As the ledger provides us with limited data we do not know exactly how well the original settler, George Crocker fared in this trade. We do know that based on the aforementioned dates that only George himself and possibly his son, George II would have been involved in the actual fur trade. Given Trout River's history however, we can speculate with great certainty that most of the male population engaged in some degree of trapping and hunting for food.

Most trapping took place inland which meant many settlers had to establish at least two homes. Only one of these would have been what might be considered a 'real home.' The others would have been merely spartan shacks or sheds, designed with only utility in mind. The trapping activities outlined above then, were another factor contributing to the patterns of transhumance described earlier. Their permanent dwellings, or the 'real home' would of course have been near the shore line for the fisheries. The second, a semi-permanent winter home would have been inland, where fuel, game, and fur were most abundant (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 246). The third, if such existed would have been located at a secondary fishing ground.

## **B. Timber**

As a result of the inability of the traditional economy to support the increasing labour force, it was necessary to diversify and explore some of the terrestrial resources to achieve economic stability. One of the most bountiful of these resources was timber and it would turn out to be critical to the settlement of the West Coast, as it was the key raw material used in the majority of their construction. In the early years timber was used for everything from building factories and schooners, to constructing fishing gear, farm tools and fences, to name but a few. In the Trout River area the forest became the chief source of fuel and building materials for the settlers.

As a result of the abundant supply of good timber, and traditionally high unemployment, commercial logging became important to the Bonne Bay area in ensuring year-round settlement. At one point there were six Sawmills in Trout River which provided seasonal employment and a small income for local residents (Sunderland 10). **Figures 2.9, 2.10, 2.11** give some idea of the way in which the work was carried out, in terms of transportation and cutting, but also in regard to how the wood was stored before processing. Many settlers were also involved in the art of boat building, and the construction of schooners became yet another activity in the town.

Yet another activity was stimulated by the abundance of timber in the area, namely barrel-making. In Trout River barrels were necessary for packing herring for transport. The good yields and high demand for herring in the American markets resulted

**Figure 2.9**

A picture of a horse drawn sleigh.

Figure 2.9



A horse drawn sleigh with carrying wood. Horwood, Harold and Stephen Taylor. *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976. 91.



**Figure 2.10**

Men working at a saw mill.

Figure 2.10



Men working at a saw mill. Horwood, Harold and Stephen Taylor. *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976. 87.

**Figure 2.11**

Piles of wood at a saw mill.

Figure 2.11



Piles of wood at a saw mill. Horwood, Harold and Stephen Taylor. *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976. 89.

in settlers engaging in this profitable, though labour intensive, operation. While satisfying their own needs, this also allowed settlers to carry on a brisk trade with area merchants. One of my informants, Stewart Crocker was involved in barrel making and had this to say about it:

\*Sometimes we'd go up in September we had to make our own barrels.

Go up and get the stuff sawed in Summerside and put it in the camp (*in Middle Arm*) - - come back in awhile - - then we'd go back gettin' wood - - preparin' for the fall, see. That would be in October - - the first of November.

Would be 25 - 30 boats up there (*in Middle Arm*) (Crocker #11).

With the growth of the lobster fishery during the late 1800s, much employment was also generated in the construction of lobster pots, traps and wooden crates for packaging. As a result of the growing number of settlers involved in the lobster fishery the need for production facilities grew and gave more locals employment building the factories (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 251).

Another occupation that also provided a source of income was logging in the Lomond area. One of my informants, Alice White, describes her experience in some detail.

\*I was in to Lomond with Uncle Bill Hann and Uncle Charl when I was 15 cookin' for 7 men. They had a big red ox then, they used to call him Old Sack. An he used to haul all the logs... well, the pulp junks<sup>14</sup>

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14

The DNE defines a junk as, "a piece or lump of anything" or as "a short log to fit a wood-burning stove or fire-place, often with back, fore or middle as qualifying word." This is an accurate usage

to the river put it on the bank of the river -- to float out in the spring.

I went in in October and come back in March. Me cousin Jen went in too. I was 15 and she was 14. So we went to cook for them and wash for them all winter.

In on Three Ton (*the brook*) -- in Lomond.

They got 3 dams built on it (*the brook*)

We never came out of it from the time we went in there 'till we came out to stay.

On the old ox. That's what we came through The Gulch on.

That one (*the ox*) hauled all the logs to the brook to float them out in the spring.

I used to have to make bread every day -- with 7 men and our 2 selves -- and buns and pies -- and a baked beans, and the scaler he used to come in -- and he'd always praise up me beans and bread. He said -- 'that's the main thing in the lumber woods is good beans and good bread' (Crocker # 29).

It was about the year 1939 when Alice and her cousin went to the woods in Lomond to cook and clean for the men who cut the logs for the paper mill.

The book Lomond: The Life and Death of a Newfoundland Woods Town by James E. Candow provides a detailed description of the town of Lomond in its heyday and also talks of the men who went to the woods to cut pulp for the mill in Corner Brook. There were men from all around the Bonne Bay area and, of course, from Trout River, though the town of Lomond itself no longer exists. The whole town disappeared during the 1950s and 60s under the resettlement program. Resettlement was a process whereby small communities were moved to larger population centres where utilities and services, such as roads, water and sewer could be provided by the Newfoundland government at reasonable prices. The resettlement of Lomond would also have been affected by the

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for Trout River as well.

proposals for Gros Morne National Park, which was being considered in the 1960s as well. For some reason with the establishment of the park as an ecological reserve there was no room for maintaining remnants of the fact that people once lived in the towns. The houses of Lomond and other physical structures were dismantled. As expected the park's presence destroyed the logging in the area completely, though the future of the industry had been uncertain even earlier in the community's history.

The logging industry in the area of Lomond was already suffering difficulties before 1939 when a man by the name of Hibbert Organ managed to get things moving again. In the same year that Alice talks about in my interview with her, Candow has noted the following about the situation: 'Under Organ's leadership, woods operations resumed in the fall of 1939, presumably on the basis of a new deal to supply pulp wood to the Corner Brook mill' (Candow 35). From Alice I managed to get a better idea of what was entailed for the men of Trout River who went into the logging industry. Alice White was at the Lomond woods camp in the fall of 1939 when Organ started it up again.

We can surmise that people working in the actual logging industry would have operated in a similar fashion even before 1939. From the quote by Alice it seems that her Uncle Bill and Uncle Charlie used their own ox for pulling logs. Candow mentions a similar occurrence in his book on Lomond when he says, 'Jobbers and contractors occasionally used their own oxen to haul their wood' (Candow 65). Of the other five

men who worked there it seems likely that they were also from Trout River, due to the nature of the connections between people in rural Newfoundland at the time (*See Section IV. Genealogy*).

### **C. Agriculture and Livestock**

Resource utilization was largely motivated by economic pressure (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 243). As a result, farming became a potential keystone to the West Coast economy later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘As a result of the type of land surrounding the Trout River area, farm production was not uniform within the bay’ (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 255-256).

The main attraction of farm production for early settlers was the potential to become fully self-supporting and thereby decrease their dependence on merchants for provisions. The vegetables grown in this area were potatoes, turnip, cabbage, and other small vegetables. Cows were kept for the production of milk and butter and sheep for their wool and meat (“History of Bonne Bay and Trout River,” Decks Awash 23-24). In the early years most settlers worked pieces of land that were only one to two acres in size. These plots were located either in the backyards, which was the space between the rear of the house and the slope that lead up to the plateau, or actually on the plateau itself



as can be seen in **Figure 2.12**. Gardens were also occasionally set on the slope itself as well. With the decline of the herring fishery in the late 1870s, more and more emphasis was placed on agriculture as a way of survival. With the encroachment of Gros Morne National Park the amount of pastureland available for livestock has become severely limited (“History of Bonne Bay and Trout River,” Decks Awash 23-24). Still, many residents retain their own small vegetable gardens near their houses and a few continued to graze sheep, horses and cattle (Sunderland 10). However, in recent years, there has been a decline in even this subsistence production though one of my informants, Flora Crocker, remembers how it was:

\*When the men would be fishin’ in the spring of the year the women set gardens.

Me and poor old Mom, we set all our gardens see, cause me father and me brother used to fish and we used to set all the potatoes and turnips and cabbage - all the gardens. A lot of hard work (Crocker #2).

Alongside the park’s encroachment there are several other reasons that may be cited for the decline of agriculture. Firstly, the increase in transfer payments to the province from the federal government meant that home production was no longer as important as it had once been. While there were still families that continued to maintain small gardens and basic subsistence crops and livestock it was no longer a necessity for survival. In addition, education became compulsory after 1949, which meant that children could no longer work the fields as they had done in the past. Finally, there was the

Figure 2.12



Trout River residents tending their garden. Notice the gardens on the slope of the plateau itself. Photograph by Verna Barrett. 1959.

change in the mercantile system which enabled shops to provide a wider range of goods to consumers. (Wadel 54).

#### **D. Mineral Development**

After 1860, the discovery of mineral deposits led settlers into a new area of resource exploitation. It was predicted by many politicians that it would surpass the fishery as the most lucrative enterprise on the island. In the Bonne Bay area, there were many investors who sought out mining concessions from the government. However, while there appeared on the surface to be many mineral deposits awaiting exploration, either the deposits themselves were not commercially viable or investors had insufficient funds to develop them. Some chose to blame others claiming it was the objections of the French and the unwillingness of the British to endorse grants on the treaty shore that hampered exploration of many mineral resources (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 256).

Brazil Brake, a resident of Trout River who was interviewed for this project noted that there were prospectors in the area in 1923 and that his father worked with the prospectors up until 1930 in an area known as Narrows Head (Big Pond). Copper was the resource which was mined there at the time. Mr. Brake himself worked in the area from 1958 to 60. Prior to 1956, the copper mine in the Mount Gregory Plateau area was

operated by the Cape Copper Mining Company. After 1956, it was taken over by H.W.Knight Mining Interests of Toronto. Big things were expected due to the high grade of copper that was found in this particular mine. It was anticipated that the site could be developed into a full-scale operation within a two year period, (“A Good Grade of Copper at Trout River,” The Newfoundland Journal of Commerce) though that never came to pass. The reason is not entirely clear but one of the speculations I heard during my interviews was that the cost of accessing and exploiting the site was simply too great.

When I spoke to Brazil Brake about mining in the area he told me that, ‘for several years he (*his father*) worked with prospectors in a place called Jumbo in there on the back.....for copper.’ Then many years later, about thirty in fact, Brazil found himself working on prospecting at the site. At the time he had been farther up the coast fishing:

\*They called me down from fishing and told me Pinmen (a prospector) wanted to see me. Uncle Taylor told this guy that he thought I could do the ‘shot fire.’ This was drilling holes to put dynamite in.

I drilled 350 holes that summer and never made a miss, not one.

First when the prospector came here I was five and me and father worked in there ‘till I was twelve.

We’d walk in there (to Narrows Head and then to the Gregory Plateau) every morning. Eleven hundred and ten feet. Some places you’d have to haul yourself up by your hands - - four of us at that time (Crocker #3).

Brazil also noted that besides the copper that was found there was also exploration for diamonds. However, in spite of the considerable exploration done overall in the area no viable mines were established in or around Trout River.

## **E. Canning**

One of the chief fisheries for the community of Trout River in the late 19th century was the lobster fishery. Both the fishery itself and the processing of the catch provided significant employment. Entrepreneurs, primarily from Nova Scotia supplied fishermen with provisions and gear in return for the lobster. Many of the women and children were then hired to process the catch. By 1893, there were 40 of these concessions in operation, 25 of which were West Coast traders (Mannion Peopling of Newfoundland 251). With the rapid growth of the lobster fishery, many locals became involved in canning too. They purchased tins and other necessities from the merchants and this activity sustained many family-operated businesses.

The Newfoundland people have demonstrated the ability to survive in any situation, from constructing the skyscrapers of New York to being tossed about in gale force winds on the Atlantic ocean. The people of Trout River have shown the same kind of determination. While the men caught most of the fish, the women dried, pickled, washed and canned it. While fishing was of paramount importance to Trout River however, other work activities also had their place. These included logging for the pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook, constructing boats for men in other communities, rearing domestic animals for food and harvesting vegetables. People in many Newfoundland outport communities have traditionally practised economic and occupational pluralism as an adaptive strategy in the face of a challenging environment. As Felt and Sinclair point

out:

These challenging conditions prompt households to be occupationally diverse, that is, to diversify the household's labour over several occupations. It also prompts them to be occupationally mobile, which means individuals change occupations and employers often. They are also seasonally diverse, because their jobs change with the seasons (Felt, Sinclair 106).

#### **Section IV: Genealogy**

An essential part of the history of a town, especially a small Newfoundland community, is the genealogy of its inhabitants. Many of these smaller places were settled by a single individual, and grew larger as the children married, established themselves and then had children of their own. This process has led to entire communities being related in some manner, or at least dominated by a particular extended family group. In these cases the genealogy becomes one of the roots of a settlement's past with the history tied to individuals as much as to the place.

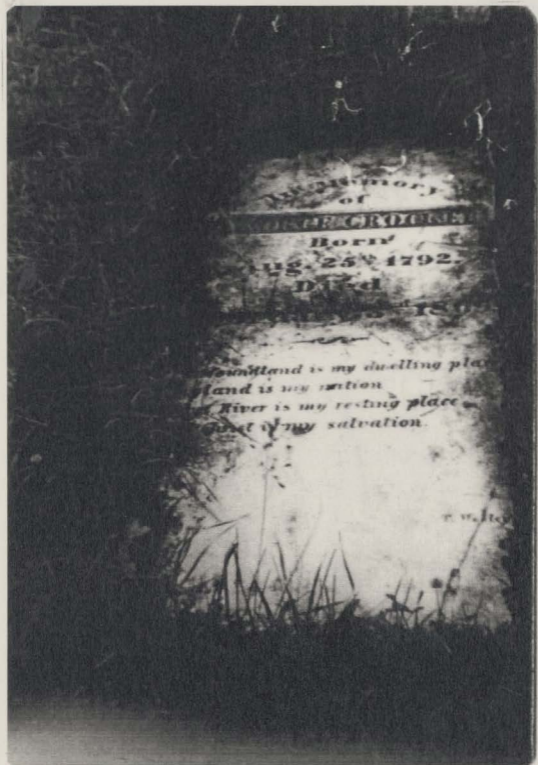
Trout River in this regard is very much a small Newfoundland community. The first settler to the area, as previously mentioned was George Crocker from Dorset, England (**Figure 2.13**). As the first settler he had his pick of the land in the bay area. The spot he chose was directly on the beach near the sand bar where the wharf now sits. His gardens were likely located just to the east at the base of the plateau. The beach sloped at a considerable incline to the water line so when flood waters came they generally did not affect the house or gardens. It is not known if George Crocker claimed the land in the beach area immediately or if it was simply taken by his children for their homes and gardens at a later date. However, it is known that in the early 1900s the land was indeed controlled by the Crocker families and any new residents were forced to purchase living space from them. One example of this is the area on the northern end of the beach where the Harrises bought land from the Crockers. Given the reciprocal nature

**Figure 2.13**

The original settler, George Crocker's head stone.



Figure 2.13



The original settler, George Crocker's head stone. Photograph by author. 1968.

of the Trout River economy, however the land might well not have been paid for in cash. Instead, it might go for a few loads of wood, an ox or horse, a boat or just about anything else.

The original settler George, and his wife Catherine Blanchard had 10 children, all born in Trout River. Of these George II, William Henry, Luke, Charles and Job are known definitely to have stayed. These families and their children are illustrated in the family tree diagrams in figures 2.14 to 2.17.<sup>15</sup> These sons followed the tradition of staying to live in Trout River with their brides, a practice common elsewhere in Newfoundland (Mannion Point Lance 14). In the third generation we know that William Henry had two sons that also stayed after marriage, William Henry (II), and Jacob. William Henry (II) married a Mary Harris who may have been the daughter of one of the Harrises that bought land on the north end of the beach. We also know that four of Luke's children married and remained as well, Elizinia, Hezekiah, George and Adam. Elizinia married an Amos White, Hezekiah married a Sarah Jane Parsons and Adam married a Theresa Brake. These are all family names found in Trout River currently, which means that men of these family names must have come to Trout River at some

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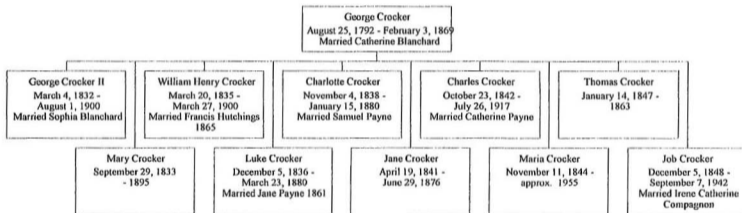
The information for the family trees was acquired from a large number of informal sources spanning a period of about 20 years of the author's life. Information was originally gathered for personal reasons from her family, immediate and extended, at various family reunions, community come-home year festivities and from other people's lists of family members. As such it is impossible to cite this information properly or adequately. However, it should be noted that much of the information was verified by the author's informants during the fieldwork period.

**Figure 2.14**

The family tree of the Original George Crocker.

Figure 2.14

### The Original Settler of Trout River and his Immediate Children

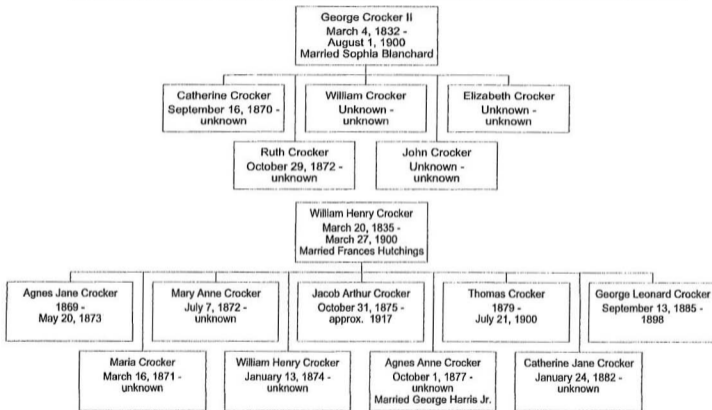


**Figure 2.15**

The family trees of George Crocker's sons, George II and William Henry, who both stayed in Trout River.

Figure 2.15

The Known Members of the Second Generation of Trout River that remained with their Families

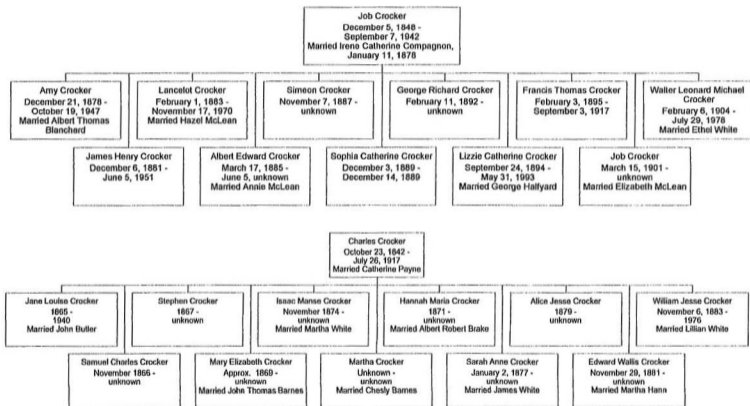


**Figure 2.16**

The family trees of George Crocker's sons, Job and Charles.

Figure 2.16

The Known Members of the Second Generation of Trout River that remained with their Families



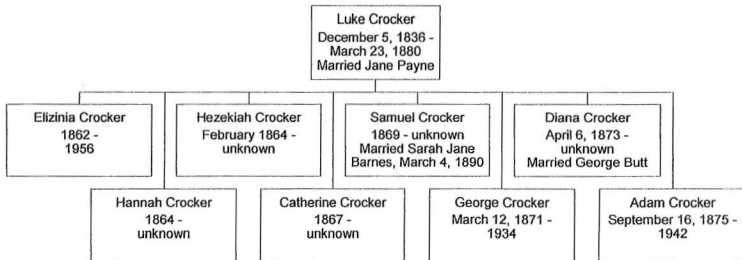


**Figure 2.17**

The family trees of George Crocker's son, Luke Crocker.

**Figure 2.17**

The Known Members of the Second Generation of Trout River that remained with their Families



NOTE: the families listed are those that remained in Trout River and are therefore of concern to us. The original settler, George Crocker had a child named Charlotte whose family is known to us but as they were born and raised in Parson's Pond we have not included them. We have also assumed that the other three girls moved away to live with their husbands as well, as was traditional.

point. The time of the marriages seems to coincide with the approximate dates of the family name's appearance in Trout River as well (Cuff 426). Taken together it seems to indicate that these women either married after their families arrived in Trout River, or because they married into the Crockers their extended family decided they had a foothold, or an investment in family there. This latter motivation, that is to follow married family members, could easily have provided sufficient grounds on which to come to a relatively prosperous place like Trout River. Along similar lines we know that the original George's son, Charles had children that married into families with the last name White, Brake, Hann, and Barnes, all of which appear in Trout River, possibly for the same reasons that were stated above. Given the time period of which we are speaking the number of people available for marriage was still limited. Exposure was a major factor in these unions and the networks and connections formed by the parents were usually limited. As one might expect these contacts involved families the parents themselves had married into, or families their near relatives had married into. Hence the selection of family names we see are also limited. For example, if the mother, a Crocker, had married into a family with the surname White then their networks would consist of the near relatives, White's and Crocker's and people in the immediate community. This would make up the limited pool of potential partners the children came in contact with, and thus likely the people they eventually married. These new couples would usually have settled in the place where the husband was born, especially if this was the prevalent pattern. In these

cases his father and brothers would have had land, some of which might have found its way to the new couple. This was frequently the situation in Trout River. This acquisition of land would have been particularly beneficial because the area was economically prosperous and occasionally experienced booms in the fish and fish related trades. Such opportunity coupled with the presence and support of family relations and cheap, or perhaps free, land would have made an appealing alternative to moving to a new and unknown town.

It should be noted at this point that in rural Newfoundland the people rely on their families, both immediate and extended. For a new couple the parents might provide land, brothers and sisters might help with fishing, farming, logging and domestic activities, and children, when old enough, with the same. The family unit supported the pattern of occupational pluralism which allowed families to survive and prosper in the harsh marine climate of Newfoundland.

In talking to informants and using my own memory I was able to construct a basic model of the land dispersal. I have also researched potential map holdings and have located a map of the Trout River area known as the Reid Survey Map Lot 206<sup>16</sup>, the series of which was done between the 1940s and 1950s and can be seen in **Figure**

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16

Reid Lot Survey Map Lot 206, map (n.p., n.d.). Note: this map was found at the Department of Crown Lands in St. John's, who, while they possessed the map had no information on its origins.

2.18.<sup>17</sup> This is the first appearance of official land demarcation in map form. According to tradition the houses of the parents would have been passed down to their children. Oral tradition and personal recollection has enabled me to locate specific locations for some of the earliest settlers. In Newfoundland newly married couples often built close to family, generally on a section of the parents' land. This accounts for the close grouping of houses near the Point and immediately north along the Beach. Other areas of the town were much more spread out for this reason as well. From this information we can conclude that the children that remained in Trout River built close to the original George Crocker, and then their children in turn built close to them. It is likely that the rest of the beach and along the river were not settled until the third or fourth generations, by both the Crockers and other families. As noted on the Reid Lot map the areas along the river especially were owned by people with surnames other than Crocker. As expected, the centre of town quickly became the area around the original George Crocker's home where settlement was densest. It was near this area on the Point that the wharf was built, and before that the merchant's shop and many of the barns and fish stores of the individual fishermen. Fish flakes were very common at that time, stretching out around the mouth of the river. There was an expansion in the other direction along the beachfront where houses were built and farther east along the river which is shown on the Reid Lot

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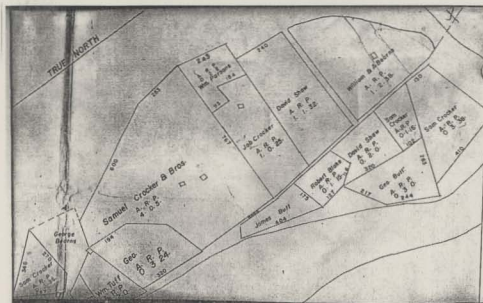
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These dates come from talking to people in Crown Lands. Apparently the dates are well known in the department though none of the maps themselves are dated.

**Figure 2.18**

Sections of the Reid Lot Survey Map Series for Trout River, circa 1940s or 50s.

Figure 2.18



Sections of the Reid Lot Survey Map Series for Trout River, circa 1940's or 50's (information from Ron Penney, Department of Crown Lands, Government of Newfoundland)



map, and is reflected in the pattern visible today. Unsurprisingly the Argin' Ground was also located directly in the middle of this dense cluster.



### Chapter Three: The Argin' Ground

Arg v EDD argue v 1: arg s w cties. To dispute verbally; to attempt to convince.

1898 Christmas Bells 16 'Tain't no use to arg with the Poor Commissioner. T 55-64 An' they get drunk an' 'get playin' cards an' then they get out of sorts over it, arg an' fight on the last of it lots o' times. T 253-66 My book was lost God knows how long, but Aunt Charlotte tried to arg me out of it, that I wasn't right (Dictionary of Newfoundland English 9).

The term 'Arg' or 'Argin' was used in Trout River to describe discussion or argument between individuals. As one might expect the Argin' Ground was a location where individuals, men in this case, gathered to interact, discuss and argue. One folklorist, Barre Toelken notes;

Language is a traditional frame for learning, a basis for human interaction, a form of practical or pleasurable expression, and a way of structuring and placing meaning on the myriad experience coming at us from our world (Toelken 25).

He also notes the importance of body language discussing 'gestures, facial expression, body position, tone of voice, proximity to others' (Toelken 25) as other factors that would inform the observer's evaluation of what was being said. All of these features of verbal encounters were apparent on the Argin' Ground which served as the primary location for the transfer and dissemination of news, functioning in much the same way as the La Have General Store where speaking became, 'the focus of a high degree of interest, elaboration, and evaluation' (Bauman Journal of American Folklore 330). As a child I had heard of the Argin' Ground where men gathered to talk. Later when I went

back to the community to do fieldwork I was told about other things, in addition to the stories, news, and weather forecasting which also happened on the Argin' Ground. These were things like wood carving (called skiddlin'<sup>18</sup> or chiddlin'), playing games, holding an open-air church service, and occasionally, fighting. Bauman explains that such meeting places reflect 'the cultural concerns and preoccupations of the people' (Bauman Journal of American Folklore 330).

The content of the talk which took place at the Argin' Ground would be reformulated for performance as narrative in other contexts in a manner analogous to that described by James Faris in his accounts of verbal exchanges in Cat Harbour.

Often as soon as those listening had gotten a few of the details, one or more would leave to go to the "residential" shops and thus themselves be the recipients of the attention and esteem of the shop gathering as they repeated the 'news' they had gotten at Scarlet's Shop. This secondary transmission may have already been made, so in order to make it 'news' again, an exaggeration or twist might be added (Faris Anthropologica 242).

This was mirrored in Trout River in the retelling of 'news' heard at the Argin' Ground to people who were not present, usually members of an individual's own household or acquaintances who had not been present at the Argin' Ground.

On a sunny Wednesday afternoon, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992 I walked along the road by the

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The terms skiddlin' or chiddlin' are not found in the DNE but in Trout River they refer to the practice of wood carving, in the broadest sense of the term, by the men of the community. While this practice occasionally yielded something of use, usually it was simply slicing and notching off small chips of a larger piece of wood. This was likely just something to keep their hands occupied while they spoke, possibly a subtle relaxation technique-turned-habit, though this is merely speculation.

brook (Trout River) and dropped in to visit Brazil Brake, who lived on the corner by the Argin' Ground in the house once owned by the merchant, Charlie Butt. His wife Stella was sitting in the rocking chair by the stove while he sat by the table. Though she didn't want to be taped or interviewed herself she made sure to correct Brazil whenever he was wrong. Seventy-year-old Stella had just returned from a Canada Day Ceremony in which she had been the oldest person there, and so had got to cut the celebration cake. We chatted a little bit about that and then I asked Brazil about the Argin' Ground. His response was:

\*On the road going down to The Point, to the fish store ever since I was six years old people have been standing there argin' about one thing and another. Some of them might be argin' about back in their father's time, where their fathers come from -- and some would be argin' about cattle, cod fish -- how much they got that day -- and all this kind of stuff -- dryin' fish and makin' flakes -- everything was spoke about. They'd spend a lot of time there. In the late evening after supper -- that's when they would spend the most time there (Crocker #3).

I asked Brazil how many men would be there at any one time, and whether or not he was one of them. He said there would be 'five to 25' and he 'would go there just for a few minutes to listen and then go.' He also added, 'a lot of people would go there just to listen to the main ones argue.'

When I asked Brazil whether women went to the Argin' Ground his laughing response was 'Only when they were lookin' for a man!' It was indicated by all the people that I spoke to that women did not hang around up there. However, children, both boys and girls, played games around the area while the men talked. Most women

would simply walk by, ignoring the assembly to wait for their husbands to come home with the latest news, or gossip. However, some females would tease the men by poking fun and by imitating them. It was from another informant that I heard more about this.

One evening almost a month after my encounter with Brazil I went to visit Alice and Alex White. We had a lunch together and a long chat. Outside the rain was coming down and a cold fog was rolling in around the hills. Inside however, the house was comfortable and cheerful. The two of them provided me with many good stories and information as well as wonderful company for several hours. (Figure 3.0) It was as we sat around the kitchen table that Alice told me about a little bit of fun that she had as a child with her sister as they played around the Argin' Ground or walked past the men:

\*We used to be hard tickets then, see, we'd go down and hide away and watch for them - - hide away behind one of the stores and watch for them, chiddlin' it out and chiddlin' it and me sister Mary, say, she'd take a little pocket knife, perhaps a little tiny one in her pocket. She'd watch, hey - - and she'd get up and do the same as they were doing. Then we'd get in a fit of laughing, see, and they'd catch us - - see then we'd have to run and make our escape (Crocker # 29).

The Argin' Ground was an interest that carried on into adulthood. Even as a young woman Alice it seems would be curious about what was happening at this gathering place. She told me about how she and her sister would push the baby prams very slowly on the turn in the road where the Argin' Ground lay. They would then take advantage of the opportunity to listen to what the men were saying. The talk and related activities that they observed and imitated took place on the piece of land recognized by all the people of

Trout River as the 'Argin' Ground'.

**Figure 3.0**

The top picture is of the Barnes, the bottom one is of the Whites

Figure 3.0



The Barnes, Andrew, Herb and Majorie. Photograph by author. 1992.



Alice and Alex White. Photograph by author. 1992.

## Section I. Location

It was situated in an area of the community that the people most often referred to as, 'up on The Point' or 'up on The Corner'. It was centrally located and about the same distance from either end of town. **Figure 3.1** shows the site as it was in 1950, as viewed from the road coming up to towards The Point. More recent views can be seen in **Figures 3.2 and 3.3**. While actually standing around this particular spot the people present would have a clear view of the whole of Trout River Bay.

While searching for more information about the Argin' Ground I went to visit Hazel Penney at her house in Corner Brook on March 7, 1994. She lived in Trout River until she was fifteen when she left to look for work. We were sitting at the kitchen table and I was watching her cut out cloth squares to make a blanket while recording the conversation in my field notes.

*(Author)* What area do you remember as the Argin' Ground?

*(Hazel)* Well, there was an old shed up there, on that spot. It was about the size of an outdoor toilet.

*(Author)* A shed?

*(Hazel)* Yes. That's where the men would stand around, all around the shed. *(This is **Figure 3.1**, a picture that was given to me by Hazel and shows the shed she spoke about located behind the woman in the forefront.)*

*(Author)* This is the first time I heard about that. What about the houses, where were they?

*(Hazel)* There was Brazil Brake on the corner, then Tom Crocker. Next to Tom was Uncle George's old house. Right across from Uncle George's was Uncle Lance's, on the beach. Next to Uncle Lance's was a wood pile that was down towards the beach. Then there was Uncle Lance's barn.

*(Author)* Did many men go to the Argin' Ground?



**Figure 3.1**

An old picture from the Crocker family album of the exact spot of the Argin' Ground when it was still being used. (dated approx.1950)

Figure 3.1

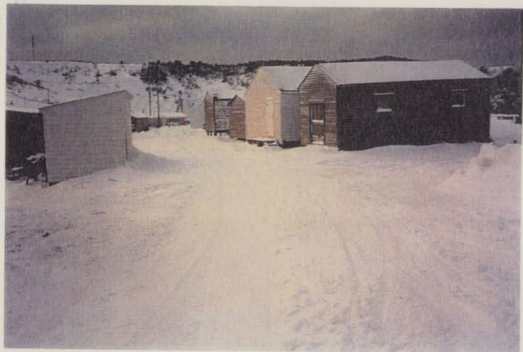


The building in the center is free standing and was the location of the Argin' Ground.

**Figure 3.2**

A Winter picture of the Argin' Ground and a larger scale picture with the exact location illustrated.

Figure 3.2



A winter picture of where the Argin' Ground was. Photograph by author. 1992.



Postcard of Trout River. n.p., approx. 1970-1985.

**Figure 3.3**

A view of the bay from the vantage point of the Argin' Ground

Figure 3.3



A view of the bay from the vantage point of the Argin' Ground. Photograph by author. 1992.

*(Hazel)* There would always be someone there, seven or eight sometimes. I only remember men standing there (Penney Personal Interview).

From this I was able to generate the map in **Figure 3.4**.

Any boat that was coming into or leaving the town could be seen, from the fishing boats of the townspeople to the schooners of the merchants and buyers. Not surprisingly, in a coastal community, maritime affairs provided much of the subject matter for discourse on the Argin' Ground.

As well as being the vantage point from which the activities going on in the bay could be observed this spot was near the mouth of the river from which the community derives its name. The river is known locally as 'The Brook,' a name that must surely be a matter of habit because by size alone it is no 'brook'. The Argin' Ground was close by the fish store too, and so made available first-hand information on the size of the catch of each fisherman as they came in from hauling their nets.

Another prominent feature of the area during the time of the Argin' Ground were the fish flakes. For many, many years there used to be flakes all around the mouth of the Brook and they occupied a sort of triangular space that encompassed both the Brook and part of the beach, right up to where the Argin' Ground was situated. The men when they went there would sit on the edge of a flake and talk.

Some might also have stood while others leaned against an old woodshed that was located near the spot. All of these things were in close proximity to each other and so talk

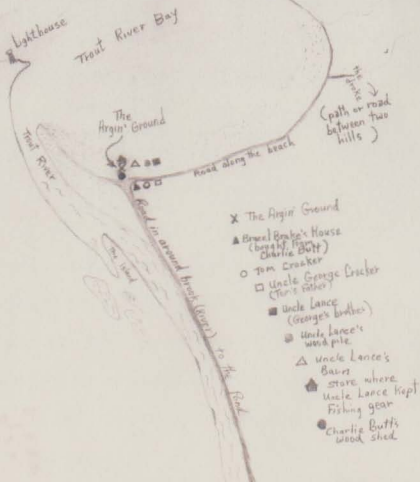
**Figure 3.4**

Close up cultural map of the Argin' Ground, circa 1945-50.



Figure 3.4

The area indicated by X is the place known to local people as The Argin' Ground. The ● shows where a woodshed stood, and ground which men gathered in windy weather.



Close up cultural map of the Argin' Ground, circa 1945-50. Drawn by author. 2001.

could be heard and exchanged.

I gained more insight into the layout of the place on a cold afternoon in December of 1992, when I was sitting at a table in the house of Claren and Hughie Brake (Figure 3.5). It was the Christmas Season and I had taken a week to travel to Trout River in order to meet with some of the residents that I had not had a chance to speak to during my stay in the area that summer. I had wanted to get a better idea of their perception of the Argin' Ground, and since each of them had grown up in the community at about the same time, they helped each other in remembering. Claren said:

*\*(Claren) There was all flakes down there (location is from the turn in the road down toward the mouth of the river). There was no road or nothing. You'd have to go down between the flakes or crawl up under them.*

*(Hughie chipped in saying) There was a little shack here and a little shack there beside the flakes. That's all there was - - they would be sittin' on the flakes and sittin' on the woodpile (the men) (Crocker #34).*

I was also told that directly on this location, known to be a stop-off place for many of the men, the ground was hard-packed sand in contrast to the sand closer to the water's edge. This was of course due to so many feet standing on this spot for so many hours and days, and months and years; one man was even heard to say: 'by the old jumpin' it was scuffed down there'. It was where the men came to talk. James Faris observes of Cat Harbour:

It's not often that information is exchanged on the road unless the parties have something short and specific to speak about between themselves, such as a detail of a previously established dyadic contract ... Exchanges on the road are regarded as being under the surveillance of the entire

**Figure 3.5**

Claren and Hughie Brake.

Figure 3.5



Claren and Hughie Brake. Photograph by author. 1992.

community (Faris Anthropologica 246).

This contrasts with the situation in Trout River, where talking on the road for all to hear was common, and is common today. In my experience of talking to my informants the gathering of the fishermen was a kind of community event. People who passed by or stopped briefly heard what was being said, and passed it along. It was its central location that made the Argin' Ground so valuable. Everyone that went there could get all, or most of the news of the day from the group that was there. On the road the individual was likely to get only fragments, mainly a recounting of the items heard that were of importance to the speaker.

In every community, large and small, there are places which are known to all of the residents. In understanding something of the function of the Argin' Ground it is necessary to understand the importance of the idea and association of place with life and the people that live there. Gerald Pocius describes how people of Calvert view their spaces in a way which parallels my experiences on Trout River. Calvert is a small town on the eastern coast of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula and has between four and five hundred people. Pocius observes that:

For Calvert, the past lives through spaces. People talk about past events and past ancestors motivated by specific concerns, but ultimately their actions are centered around specific places in the community ..... objects are transitory, made and discarded. The spaces on the land remain, and thus are the focal point of the past. The past is spatial, and talk about it reflects this (Pocius 46).

He goes on to describe the resident's pre-occupation with land ownership. This

too was a favoured topic of both men and women of Trout River. Usually one would say 'that used to be Uncle Joe's garden' or 'this was Uncle Lance's store'. Sometimes they would add the family name when there were several people of the same first name. So people would then say 'Aunt Jane Hann lived there' and 'Uncle Jess Crocker kept his ox in that barn.' Such usage recognizes the land and associates it with both people and objects, like barns or stores. As the land is permanent it forms the backbone of continuity with the past, acting as a common thread linking many people and objects or activities together. This association of place and human action is a tendency in Trout River as well as many other communities. It is something that can be seen in the Argin' Ground where the activity became connected with a specific location on the main road, and also in other communities where people gathered in specific places to talk and exchange news. For example, Linda Healey from Musgrave Harbour told me about a place in her home town where men would gather to talk. She said the place was situated on the beach side and the houses were across the road from the beach. The conversations of the men could easily be heard while she, only a child in the late 1950s and early 1960s, rode her bike around the government wharf or played on the beach nearby.

\*They would go down on the stage.

Down on the wharf in Musgrave Harbour there was a lighthouse out on the wharf - - I don't know what they used to keep in there, but there was a house by the side of the road - - I guess they stored supplies or something, because it was a government wharf.

Now there was a little small building where you went on to the wharf, right on the side of the road - - beside the lighthouse. They had little stools there and they (the men) would go and sit down there. They

could have been lobster crates turned up on their end - - I can't remember.

They would be locals (not from all over the community) the longest would be five minutes walk from his home.

The conversation was pretty civil - - no fighting or drinking - - the talk would be around fishing and what the weather was going to be, those kinds of things.

It was usually elderly men, retired. Rarely would a young man be seen there, unless he was a relative of one of the older men.

They would go there after they had their supper and had their wash (Crocker #39).

Primarily it was talk that was performed at this place instead of fighting or playing games. In Trout River this form of rhetoric was known as 'argin'. For this reason the location became known by all the inhabitants as the Argin' Ground, a term that defines both the place and activity. Many scholars have been intrigued by this type of social interaction and have spent much time in the research of how speech events are conditioned by their social settings and physical contexts. In outlining his 'rhetorical' approach to the study of folklore Roger Abrahams observes that;

Expressive folklore embodies and reflects recurrent social conflicts, thus giving them a "name", a representative and traditionally recognizable symbolic form. To handle the materials of this representation is to reveal the problem situation in a controlled context. This atmosphere of control is the primary tool of the rhetoric of a performance, the control is "magically" transferred from the item to the recurrent problem when the performance operates successfully. Sympathetically because the performer projects the conflict and resolves it, the illusion is created that it can be solved in real life; and with the addition of sympathy, of "acting"with, the audience not only derives pleasure from the activity but also knowledge (Abrahams Introductory 148).

Talk among many of the men in this little community held a special place in their

leisure time, as one of my informants, Andrew Barnes, explains how social conflict was handled by some men who went to the Argin' Ground. Thirteen-year-old Andrew had overheard his Uncle Amos and Uncle Job talking. The two men were 89 and 90 years old (1940). They were talking about a guy named Johnny Butler who had to spend a year in jail for raping a thirteen-year-old girl. The two old men seemed to be sympathetic to this man's plight of having to go to jail and didn't agree with it. Andrew related that Uncle Job said, 'I'd give her a good boot,' and Uncle Amos said, 'I'd rape her again.'<sup>19</sup>

Although neither of the men were involved in the crime they chose the Argin' Ground to talk about it and decide how they would have handled the situation. As these two men were considered prominent spokesmen for the community they probably gave the impression that their opinions were what most men would have concluded.

In talking about this gathering place with people I discovered that their accounts confirmed Goffman's view of the relationship between performance and setting:

Performance refers to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his presence before a particular set of observers and which had some influence on the observers. Setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it (Goffman 22).

When the men came to the corner, or 'up on The Point', as it was called, they came to interact with each other, or to give a 'performance.' They were all 'regulars',

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This quote is not verbatim and comes from Crocker #32.



men who would walk up to the Argin' Ground every day. It was this spot, the Argin' Ground, that was the necessary setting for the performance, both because of the particular set of observers and, in Goffman's terms, their influence on them (Goffman 22). At the Argin' Ground everyone present knew each other and each one expected a certain 'performance' from particular individuals. As one informant put it, 'He couldn't arg now could he?', which meant that he could carry a debate very well. However, winning a debate one day was no guarantee of victory in that matter as it would probably be a topic that resurfaced another day.

## **Section II: A Context for Social Interaction**

In terms of the exact content and style of interactions on the Argin' Ground much of what we know is derived from reconstruction. By the 1960s the Argin' Ground was in decline, its traditional purpose and base of support eroding under the pressures of technological change. I will discuss these factors in more detail in Chapter 4, but suffice it to say that by 1970 the Argin' Ground was a thing of the past. Consequently my sources of information were limited. For example, there was never anything written about the Argin' Ground as a meeting place or anything else. Other folklorists have compiled works on similar meeting places of course, and these have helped me greatly in my own study, but of the Argin' Ground specifically there is none. Thus, I was limited to the remembrances of people who had seen the place or preferably people who had actually hung around or participated in discussion on the Argin' Ground. Of course, the nature of recollection is such that the memories of the people who had seen or participated on the Argin' Ground become somewhat distorted by the years that separate the memories from the present. The version I got in 1992 was then in many ways a somewhat idealized version of the meeting place, influenced by the informants' experiences since then. To some degree the memories are a function of existing in the present, and for that reason tend to reflect the values and ideas of the informants circa 1992, as opposed to the 1940s to 60s. However, the concerns of the people then are similar to those of the people now as Trout River is still a fairly isolated fishing community, though with technology a

somewhat more knowledgeable one. Unfortunately, little can be done about this without adding another layer of distortion to the information gathered, ie. my attempts to clear away the second level reconstruction going on to get at the 'truth.' For this reason I have not made the attempt to 'clarify' what my informants have passed on, and the reader can keep this in mind when reading the reconstruction presented.

From my informants I learned that as previously mentioned, only men went to the Argin' Ground. Further, it was primarily the older men who did the talking with the younger men simply listening. In terms of age we can assume that a young man would be at minimum 17 or 18 years old, roughly the age when they might enter the work force as a full fledged member. An older man would have been considered someone from a minimal age of 35 upwards. We can also assume that the Argin' Ground as a distinct entity would have been disappearing in the 1960s. This means that to simply find an informant that had been there as a man, say age 17, in 1992 the youngest he might be would be 40 and that assumes he was there in 1969. Even those who had minimal involvement as young men in the 1960s would at the time of interviewing have been between 40 and 49, at least. Most reliable informants that might have actually participated would have been considerably older. Further, not all men frequented the Argin' Ground. The men who did not go to this meeting place gave having no time for it as their reason when queried by the author. As one might expect the demographic for over-fifty males that frequented the Argin' Ground in Trout River, whose population was somewhere around 600 or 700

people in 1992, was limited.

Thus it became necessary for me to reconstruct the Argin' Ground from the recollections of a range of individuals, including those who had only been there a few times, and those like women and children who had only seen it from the periphery. Nonetheless, this along with comparative work done by other folklorists allowed me to form a clear picture of the Argin' Ground in terms of place, content and function. As I have looked at place it is necessary to look at content.

The most reliable extant examples of the content of talk on the Argin' Ground exist in the form of personal narratives. Their reliability rests not with the factual validity of the stories but rather their similarity to the narratives originally told on the Argin' Ground. Many of the older informants have stories in which they were active or passive characters and it would have been they who had related the story originally. One specific example of this is from Toss White, who relates the following personal narrative:

\*She stole some wool from me there awhile ago. I had me sheep out in the garden and this day there was one missin'.

We looked and looked for it -- couldn't find her. Anyway, she was gone all night.

Well, the next day the sheep was back -- and she was all sheared - - all the wool was gone. I thinks Catern took me sheep and barred her in and sheared her -- and kept the wool. Then sent her back -- no I wouldn't put it past her, that's what she did (Crocker #9).

After the personal narrative was told it would have become the communal property of those individuals that had heard it on the Argin' Ground. It was in this manner that the Argin' Ground fulfilled its primary function as a medium of information transfer.

Once the personal narratives were told the men there would retell them at home, at other meeting locations and in many cases at the Argin' Ground again, though at another date and time. These narratives were likely embellished in the manner of those Faris describes in Cat Harbor, that is the narrative would be modified to become a new piece of 'news' that could now be attributed to the current narrator as opposed to the story's originator (Faris Cat Harbour 146-147). So their fidelity to the original narration is difficult to access. Narratives of this type were also commonly the form of story that arrived from outside the community as 'news.' These particular narratives might have come through many sources before arriving in Trout River, being told and retold from person to person perhaps from halfway across the globe. One example of this was related to me by Alice and Alex White as follows:

*\*(Alex) Uncle Steve Harris would bring the mail out on his back. Walk in and out (through The Gulch) in the same day.*

*(Alice) He was 93 or 94 (when he died).*

*(Alice) One time the cops come. He was up in his 80s then and he was over up on these high hills (in The Gulch) and he had his gallon of molasses. He used to take over in the fall of the year and hang it in the tree so he would have it there for his bread; and he was comin' with the rabbit - - and it was out of season, so the warden stopped him, ahey.*

*(Alex) The Ranger, used to be Rangers then, ahey.*

*(Alice) And the Rangers stopped him and he said, 'You know you're not allowed to have that rabbit, it's out of season,' ahey. And he said, 'Well, I worked hard, me little man,' he used to say; 'For that,' he said. They talked on and after awhile he said, 'How old are you?' When he told him how old he said, 'Well if you got guts enough to walk over here and get that rabbit, take 'n and go home with 'n' (Crocker #29). (Figure 3.6)*

Of course, narratives were not the only form of discourse that took place on the

**Figure 3.6**

Picture of Uncle Steve Harris.

Figure 3.6



Uncle Steve Harris. Horwood, Harold and Stephen Taylor. *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976. 90.

Argin' Ground. By definition 'argin' is rhetoric and rhetorical exchange was common. On the Argin' Ground just about anything could be debated, from the weather to methods of catching fish to the likelihood of a particular law coming to pass. In these cases the debate would be aimed at persuading the opposing party to accept the debater's point of view. The tone of the rhetoric would depend on the subject, the individual's beliefs and the reactions of those engaged in the interaction to each other's ideas and persuasive tactics. In some cases the argument might become heated enough to devolve into physical confrontation, though this was the exception, not the rule.

This rhetoric was considerably more variable than the narratives presented on the Argin' Ground. By this I mean that the structure and content of the rhetoric could vary widely and was not restrained by any particular need to remain a coherent entity. Rhetoric could be anything from logical argument, to practically brow-beating the opponent with nearly incoherent words, to the simple explanation of a concept.

Rhetoric might also involve the use of many of the discreet forms of verbal performance that appeared on the Argin' Ground. It is helpful here to keep in mind Abraham's theories on a rhetorical approach to folklore in order to understand the way in which these many verbal genres could be and were used in rhetorical situations;

As the rhetorical approach considers techniques of argument, it assumes all expression is designed to influence, and that we must simply discover the design. Folklore, being traditional activity, argues traditionally; it uses arguments and persuasive techniques developed in the past to cope with recurrences of social problem situations. In fact, the very traditional nature of the expression is one of the important techniques of persuasion



in a traditional-oriented group. The problems specifically attacked by folk expression are those that threaten the existence of the group. Folklore functions normatively, as a cohesive force (Abrahams Introductory 146).

The use of third person and personal narratives in a rhetorical context can be seen then as a method of persuasion through example, a citation to validate an argument, viewpoint or belief. An example of this would be the memorate, a story of a supernatural occurrence. Such a story would serve to remind the listeners in a rhetorical group context of the traditionally held belief about the supernatural. The memorate would also serve as an example to persuade the people listening that the traditionally held beliefs were still valid; that they were 'rational' beliefs to use Patrick Mullen's terminology. Like Abrahams, Mullen reiterates the idea that groups use certain beliefs to cope with social situations; 'Beliefs are further strengthened by being learned at an early age, ... The beliefs are internalized; they become part of the personality structure' (Mullen Function of Magic 219). The following memorate would have served to attempt to convince the listeners of the traditionally held 'fact' that ghosts really did exist:

\*The nurse said 'you want to go up to see Aunt Ame before she dies?' I said 'not particularly.' She said, 'you better go up now if you want to see her alive.'

So we went up grandfather took me by the hand and we went upstairs, looked at her in the room and turned around and went back down. Less than 10 minutes later I heard this noise and looked up in the second story window and there was this light, almost like a person and I booted her from there to home. I was telling dad and mom what I seen in the window when Heck walked in behind me and said his mother was dead.

I still says it was her (*Aunt Ame's ghost in the window*).<sup>20</sup>

Another method of persuasion that was commonly used on the Argin' Ground was the insult. Abrahams notes the following about insults:

Those who study language in social contexts approach insults as units of ongoing speech that are contrived acts of rudeness or personal challenge intended to intensify a conflict relationship between the insulter and those to whom the insult is directed (Abrahams Insult 145).

Such intensifying of the rhetorical process could serve to keep the individual whom the arguer is trying to convince off balance, thus potentially gaining the upper hand in a discussion. By contrast, the insult could be used as a defensive measure to deflect or dull a particularly successful line of argumentation from an opponent. This would be especially true in terms of obvious insults, but a more common type of insult would probably have been more subtle. It is difficult to provide evidence of the content and tone of insults because of the fact that the Argin' Ground is being remembered, not directly observed, and also because the subtle insults, or slights, would have been heavily influenced by the context in which they were used. For example, in order to understand something like, 'I got a good load of fish today,' as anything other but a passing comment you might have to understand the following; that the target of the comment had done poorly in their fishing lately, that fishing was important to the people listening to the interchange, and that the people listening knew that the target of the comment had done

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Crocker #19. Note: the informant was very young when the story took place. This relationship between age and belief is similar to the association made by Mullen in his article.

poorly fishing lately. We are left to infer that insults were commonly used on the Argin' Ground and that they may be direct or ironic in nature. One example of an insult was provided by Basil Crocker:

\*Charl Barnes said "there's nothing out there to frighten you. Next day I asked him "was he frightened." (*Lawrence laughs*) He said "no is nothing out there to frighten you." I said "you know what Charl if you seen that on TV it would frighten the god damn shit out of ye. Now get me right," I said (Crocker #5).

The use of proverbs had a similar rhetorical function;

A verbal genre of folklore also widely employed in literary contexts. The proverb is seldom more than one sentence long, and it usually expresses one main idea. The message of the proverb is formulated in a way that implies a summary of the wisdom collective experience. This effect is often enhanced by the insertion of introductory formulas at the beginning (such as "It is said ..." or "The old people say ..."), the specific wording of the formula following the poetic conventions of the culture and the kind of authority upheld by its norms (Hasan-Rokem 128).

This summary of wisdom is a quick device for conveying a larger example, one with information that is generally regarded as being particularly meaningful. The saying, 'red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky in the morning, sailors take warning,'<sup>21</sup> represents a piece of wisdom about the methods of foretelling weather. It was believed that if the sky was red at sunset, it was a sign that the weather out on the ocean would be good the following morning. When the sky was red at dawn, however it was believed

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21

This was a proverb I learned as a child from my parents, and which I heard said a lot as I was growing up in Trout River. I also heard it when I returned to do my fieldwork from people of a number of different generations.

that the day would see bad weather, possibly even a storm. Such a piece of wisdom could be used in an argument as evidence that the weather would be a certain way, stormy by noon perhaps. Another example comes from Gilbert Crocker:

\*I wasn't satisfied to make away with it, see. 'Take it or leave it,' he said. They (*The Park*) were goin' to take it anyway. So I took it. I had no say in it (Crocker #8).

Almost all interactions on the Argin' Ground were in some way rhetorical. Many of the stories told on the Argin' Ground were likely told for their own sake, or simply to relieve boredom. While such pieces could be used later for rhetorical purposes they need not have been initiated for that reason. However, the teller might acquire a certain increase in status amongst the group for a narrative well told, even one told for its own sake originally. Along similar lines a genre with little rhetorical intent might be the joke. While it could quite possibly enforce certain traditionally held societal perceptions it was unlikely to be an active ingredient in someone's argument. Like a narrative though, a joke could prove to be entertaining and therefore increase an individual's status without explicitly being an argument. Still, these things are an implicit argument for better status within the group. One example of a joke was related to me by Majorie Barnes:

\*I had two rabbits cooked and vegetables and two rabbits and Hazel White was there - - she was telling a story see, and we were all laughin' when she was telling the story about someone dying and she was going right to it eating the rabbit, and bye and bye she said, 'laugh away there's one piece left.' She had all the rabbits eat, and the bones thrown in fender of the stove (*she laughs heartily*). And when she got to the last piece she said 'laugh away, there's one piece left' (Crocker #33).

A difficulty with reconstructing what happened in a place like the Argin' Ground is accessing not only the content and context, but also the texture of the verbal interactions which took place there. 'In most of the genres (and all those of a verbal nature), the texture is the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes employed. Thus in verbal forms of folklore, textural features are linguistic features' (Dundes Southern Folklore Quarterly 254). My opinion is that much, if not most of the discussion on the Argin' Ground was rhetorical in nature. The rest was intended as a matter of entertainment, especially when people were lacking all of the technological devices we take for granted, like television, radio and the Internet.

One other major genre I have not mentioned that is relevant to the Argin' Ground is gossip. Brenneis defines gossip as:

Talk about absent others, often talk about those very characteristics and activities they would least like having discussed. Even when its contents are not scandalous, gossip has a somewhat illicit air, as gossipers are telling some else's story, one to which they have no right. On the other hand, gossip also provides opportunities for the expression of moral values ... (Brenneis 150).

Gossip so defined would not have been considered such on the Argin' Ground, as 'gossip' was generally regarded as a female-specific form of verbal interaction. Nonetheless, by Brenneis' definition gossip would have occurred on the Argin' Ground, especially in such a small community where everyone was known to each other. However, I have included this last in the typology of verbal content for the Argin' Ground because its natural context was primarily outside of the meeting area, in the privacy of the

homes, sheds and gardens of individuals. It is necessary to consider, though the effect of gossip on the information that actually reached the Argin' Ground. In the tangled web of information transfer gossip would have produced substantial data that would then make its way to the meeting place. There is another aspect of the information produced by gossip described by Szwed as follows:

Not only the facts of gossip are important here, but also the evaluation made by and about other individuals during the information flow, for evaluation is inextricably tied up with face-to-face information exchange. Gossip, in this sense, is not only a means for an individual to assemble basic information on his peers, but is also a technique for summarizing community opinions, i.e., it is a sort of tally sheet for public opinion. One draws on gossip to establish an opinion, but also uses it to influence others. (Szwed 435).

Such a generator of information would have been influential in shaping verbal content on the Argin' Ground, but would not necessarily have been the form in which it was presented there. Brenneis himself notes that the concept of 'gossip' is somewhat ambiguous;

It is clear that a unifunctional interpretation of gossip would be misleading. The specifics of how it works and how it influences social life vary considerably from one culture to another. Gossip can serve at the same time to further partisan ends and reinforce group values. Similarly, while it can threaten to disrupt relations with some - those talked about - it also can be an essential way of building and sustaining sociability, of weaving together a social web by weaving words together (Brenneis 152).

It is important to note that both Brenneis and Szwed use the term 'gossip' as an etic category. This differs from its use as an emic category by the people they are referring to. For the researcher 'gossip' describes simply a certain type of information

flow, and in terms of Trout River that style of information flow existed for both men and women, though it took place in different locations. For the people of Trout River the term 'gossip' was something women did, whereas the same type of information exchange between men was considered 'news.'

In contrast to the content of discussion on the Argin' Ground, the style of the speech required a different sort of reconstruction. This was because of the fact that without the presence of tape recordings of the people of Trout River from the beginning of its settlement onwards, we have almost no evidence available. Written descriptions of the dialect of Trout River are equally scarce. For these reasons the reconstruction of dialect is, of necessity highly speculative. This is not to say that the effort is unimportant, however. For someone outside the community looking in at this meeting place, it is essential to realize that while the language used is English it is a highly localized and accented form of English. The discussions that took place there were not those of people using standard English to express their ideas, but rather of people who employed dialect to convey their ideas more clearly and efficiently, as was the case for many other isolated outposts in Newfoundland.

Nearly every activity in which Newfoundlanders engage has its special local vocabulary; but it is principally in those activities in which, until recently, most of the population were directly engaged that linguistic inventiveness is most strikingly seen. Moreover these activities are associated with outlying areas, not strongly influenced by a large number of people speaking an educated, standard language. (Story English Usage 321)

By its nature language is a living thing that changes and adapts to the circumstance of its users. The first settler in Trout River would have been George Crocker who would have brought with him the English of his home of Dorset, England. This would not likely have changed much given his limited contact with others after moving to Newfoundland. His children, however would have been influenced by both his accent and that of his Newfoundland wife, Catherine Blanchard. The new dialect of the second generation would have been a fusion of these two dialects as well as other Newfoundland dialects they had exposure to. The same would have held true for the third generation, and would have included any terms that were created to describe some aspect of their situation. The dialect would have evolved further with the immigration of Harrises, Brakes, Hanns, Whites, Barnes and others, who came from other parts of Newfoundland and would have brought their own terms and speech patterns with them. The integration of these dialects has resulted in the current Trout River dialect, circa 1950's to present. As Paddock notes;

It therefore appears that any linguistic element (whether word, pronunciation, or grammatical form) survived or flourished in Newfoundland English only if it served some purpose or could be fitted into the developing systems of the local dialects. (Paddock 78)

The most important factor influencing local dialect in recent years has been the presence of the media, both television and radio, and the breaking of Trout River's isolation by the road to Woody Point and beyond. Further, the advent of compulsory education that came with Confederation has served to further bring the people of Trout



River toward a more standardized version of English. The change in occupational pursuits has also likely made the dialect's vocabulary somewhat less functional. As Paddock further illustrates;

Despite some evidence (see Clarke, in this book) that Newfoundlanders have more language loyalty than do most linguistic minorities, we can expect continuing erosion of Newfoundland dialects. It seems that the vocabulary is most vulnerable. If a word no longer refers to anything, because of changes in our way of life, it will disappear quickly. Certain striking nonstandard features of pronunciation are also dropped quickly if speakers are conscious of them. (Paddock 80)

Still, the dialect conserves many of the words used by previous generations, dating back to the original George Crocker and beyond, to his home in Western England.

... two factors of prime importance have resulted in a distinct regional language, some elements of which are found on the lips of all Newfoundlanders born and bred on this Island and in Labrador. The first is the historical connection of Newfoundland with two particular regions of the British Isles (Ireland and the Western counties of England) which brought the marked dialects of these regions to the Island and the Coast of Labrador on the lips of the original settlers and of those who followed them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The second was the complex fusion of social, economic, geographic and cultural factors which created unusual conditions in Newfoundland for the preservation of these original dialect strains and at the same time released the process of linguistic innovation and change. Conservatism and innovation have, indeed, been two distinguishing features of Newfoundland speech. (Story Dialects 559)

Like all places Trout River has undergone and is still undergoing a process of dialectal evolution, the speed of which is uncertain and for our purposes unimportant. Suffice it to say that like the rest of Newfoundland Trout River has a distinct, evolving dialect. While today's dialect may not be the same as was used on the Argin' Ground in

its prime, it still exhibits the Newfoundland tendency towards linguistic conservatism, and is for our purposes a reasonable approximation of the dialect that would have been formally in use. This is particularly so among those who grew up during the period of the advent of radio, television and the appearance of the road to Woody Point. In reading about and listening to these people one gets a feel for the type of speech that would have been heard on the Argin' Ground. This is essential to an understanding of the Argin' Ground because the participants did not stand around and speak like English gentlemen, or even in the standardized English of the time. Instead, they spoke a dialect filled with words that were designed to effectively and efficiently transmit information about their situation, including work, hobbies and location. Many of these terms still exist in the Trout River dialect, and in realizing this we can come to have some understanding of the speech of the Argin' Ground. For the reasons outlined above all of the direct quotations from the tapes have been transcribed as faithfully to the dialect as possible

### Section III. Community Status and Function

Melvin Firestone describes how in Savage Cove, a community where people have to spend so much of their life in close proximity to each other, they develop an unwritten code. 'Tolerance,' he remarks,

... and self-possession are two sides of the same behavioural coin. The individual puts up with the excesses of others by erecting a barrier of impassivity. If it were not for this defence the hostility and competition of the small community would be debilitating. By "utilizing" the devices of self-possession and tolerance the individual is able to remain sufficiently uninvolved to pursue his own ends in an intimate society with a minimum of conflict (Firestone 114).

Such a code was very likely present in Trout River and on the Argin' Ground in particular during its existence. While there were cases of physical conflict it involved nowhere near the intensity and frequency that would have resulted in such a small community if these 'defence mechanisms' were not in place. It is also likely that the Argin' Ground, while serving the function of information transfer and socialization, among other things, also served as a means of catharsis;

Catharsis may be defined as the release, liberation, or reduction of emotional tension through the bringing into consciousness by abreaction - talking out, or by some other means - repressed, traumatic, symptom-producing, affect-loaded experiences. This definition commits one neither to the position that therapeutic catharsis occurs at all, or that it is produced by any one or several therapeutic techniques, nor to a particular theory as to the rationale of its occurrence (Seago 77-78).

In such a setting the men present could talk out their frustrations, getting into arguments if the mood necessitated it. These public interactions could then serve as a

release valve for part of the pressure of life in the community, a sort of cathartic release similar to the group sessions of an addictions or support group.

Primarily however, the Argin' Ground served as a locus for the transmission of information before the advent of motorized transportation and phones in the town. The information shared here was eventually disseminated through the entire town, but the content of talk could vary greatly. This parallels Faris' observations about talk in Cat Harbour (Faris *Anthropologica* 235-237), alluded to earlier. One example of this is provided by Alex White, who said that at one time he was fishing in Labrador and a fellow from the Labrador Coast told him the following story which then became a special narrative for him to tell to the men on the Argin' Ground upon his return from fishing. Alex tells it this way:

\*One time I was down to Labrador with a fellow fishing. He told me his uncle used to haul the mail down around Battle Harbour all the way up the coast to Red Bay. Where he used to come in through with the mail in the winter - - he used to come right along by the cemetery and he told me there was a woman out in the cemetery in lookin' at the graves at the time he came along with the dogs and the mail. - - And when he seen the woman - - he went for her. - - And he clung on to the sled but he had his gun on the sled along side of him. - - And he said the only way he could stop him was to shoot his first dog - - shoot his leader - - and when he shot the leader the rest of them all stopped - - they were just about to eat the woman - - Oh, they would eat her - - oh yes (Crocker # 29).

The fellow who originally told the story had an uncle who was a mail carrier and since Alex and his father had carried the mail it would have been something to share, a common bond.

It was stories of this sort, primarily personal experience narratives, that were most commonly passed along in this place. Where many people passed by quite often during the day it made for an opportunity for different members to pass along the stories themselves. For those visiting it was sometimes a brief appearance, at other times it was an extended stay that might last for several hours. My women informants said that they were too busy to stand around there and talk and besides they had children who needed their attention. Whether or not they had enough time is perhaps questionable in view of Alice White's earlier story and also of other comments she made:

\*If you passed along you could hear them. More than once we'd pass along and we'd slow down. Mary would have one of her small children in the carriage. We'd slow right down - - just barely moving - - so we could hear them.

Like Alex's father and he's brothers and a few more of the old timers (Crocker #30).

I then asked how the men at the Argin' Ground would react to a woman being there. This was Alice's response:

\*Like us?

Well, we was the kind that would say something to them for a joke, and then they would say something foolish back to us, or probably swear on us.

Not all women would do that - - but like us - - we'd always be makin' fun of 'em - - and sayin' things to them.

Like me and Marge and Mary - - three sisters.

We hung around together. Every time we'd go down there we'd have something to say.

We'd get a great kick out of it (Crocker #30).

The interaction between men and women in gender separated situations like the

Argin' Ground was subject to extensive cultural constraints at the time. Women could not simply stop at the Argin' Ground and talk with the men while letting their small children play around the area. Still, there was a desire to interact with this group of men on the community's most prominent meeting area, or if not to converse then at least be recognized.

As noted the Argin' Ground was an exclusively male establishment; the exclusion of women imposed strictly on the basis of gender. This gender division may have been common in Newfoundland from its settlement up to the mid 1900s. Like the cultures from which the settlers came, the Newfoundland culture that developed was patriarchal. One may be forgiven for suggesting also that another of the latent functions of the Argin' Ground was to maintain the established social order in the form of accepted gender roles and status. This function of folklore was first enunciated by William Bascom in his classic study of the 1950s (Bascom 333-349) and reiterated almost two decades later by Roger Abrahams:

... folklore operates within a society to ensure conformity to the accepted cultural norms, and continuity from generation to generation through its role in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture ... Viewed in this light, folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture. It is used to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from the "hardships, the inequalities, the injustices" of everyday life (Abrahams Introductory 146-147).

As a location devoted to the transfer of information the Argin' Ground would have conveyed the ideas, stories and standards of the community, the town's folklore, thereby facilitating the fulfillment of the social functions described above.

The attitude of the perceived superiority of men that was once present has now been modified and will be discussed later. Of the men that spent their time there the most permanent members were the older fishermen who were no longer able to attend to fishing nets at sea. These were the people who would always find their way to this little spot on the corner. I was told of one particular gentleman named Dan who had pedalled his bike to the Argin' Ground several times a day. He had been 70 years old and lived about a mile away. Others of course, lived much closer and would walk there.

In the early morning the younger men who would be fishing with brothers or other relatives would stop off at the Argin' Ground and wait for the rest of the crew to arrive. There the weather in terms of both the sea and sky would be discussed and a determination of what to expect for that day's work would be the topic of conversation. Then, in the evening when the fishing boats had arrived back home the younger men would again join the older men who had been present most of the day. They would already have had their catch of the day taken to the fish store and had often gone to their houses to clean up as well. This time of the evening would be a time for relaxing, a time for stories to be passed around.

The importance of the Argin' Ground as a central locus in Trout River is also

evident in the fact that besides information transfer the Argin' Ground was also used as an occasional meeting place for other events. I was told of how on a clear Sunday evening the local Salvation Army might gather there. In this open air service all would be welcome, men, women and children, and it was generally enjoyed by most people, no matter what their religious persuasion. From this central location the hymn singing would be heard for miles around as several people affectionately recounted. While the motivations for such an activity are unknown, the entertainment they provided was enjoyed by the entire community. Such an activity from an 'official' source, like a religious group, would have reinforced the legitimacy of the location and implicitly given strength to the status and function of the Argin' Ground.

Apparently political subjects would also be offered up as topics for conversation. This little outpost, like many others in Newfoundland went from being a part of an independent country to being part of the newest province of another country. In its short history of less than 200 years of known settlement it had ties to several governments, and subsequently a variable status. It had once been known as part of the French Shore, then as part of the Responsible Government under the English after its colonial status and finally a part of the Dominion of Canada. When Joey Smallwood advocating confederation came to town there were many who still were not sure that teaming up with Canada was a good move. However, it was a part of the history of this community and a lot of debates were carried out on the Argin' Ground concerning the Confederation issue. In fact Joey



himself stood at the Argin' Ground on a couple occasions during his 20 years in politics. Several of my informants have spoken of having been present during those visits. They said that he stood on a chopping block (due to his short stature) so that he could be seen by everyone. One of my informants, Dave Crocker, related his experience of one of these visits, which I recorded in my field notes one Sunday afternoon in March of 1994. He was a middle-aged man and I had gone to his house in Corner Brook to ask him about his memories of the Argin' Ground. He was born in Trout River and lived there until he was fourteen. He related this:

*(Dave)* I remember Joey giving a speech there.

*(Author)* Do you?

*(Dave)* He was standing on a chopping block. I always thought he was tall.

*(Author)* Where were you? Do you remember what he said?

*(Dave)* I don't remember what he said, I wasn't very old. I was back a ways on the road. There were about fifty people there (Crocker Personal Interview).

When I went to interview people in this community I observed in nearly every one of the homes the way that both adults and children arrive in the kitchen unannounced, and presumably uninvited. This is a phenomenon common in Newfoundland outposts. It is a psychological aspect which Firestone notes when he presents the similarities between janneys and strangers.

The First is that both janneys and strangers knock. When a knock comes at the door in the Straits, a person in the house may say, "There's a stranger at the door." When janneys knock, they are known by their loud thumps and attendant noises. Before I left St. John's for the Straits I was informed by a Newfoundlander who had worked in the area that people

enter houses without knocking; if you knock, he said, they probably not let you in. This turned out to be an exaggeration, but disclosed an essential truth. In a society characterized by familiarity and intimacy with all those living over a wide area, the knocker demonstrates by his action the absence of these qualities (Firestone 70).

This familiarity and intimacy that Firestone notes is lacking in strangers but allows most members of the community, to simply walk in.

This was something I noticed in the homes that I visited. For example, the day I visited with Minie Crocker and Delilah Duval a woman of about 50 years came in and sat on a kitchen chair by the door. She was not acknowledged, nor did she acknowledge anyone there. She stayed, sitting quietly for about 20 minutes, and then she left. A little while later a man of approximately the same age came in and sat for about a half hour and then he too left. Like the woman he was not acknowledged. The two ladies did not change their speech pattern or story in any way. They seemed to be completely at ease talking with these people present, as if the setting had not changed at all. In fact, these people melted into and became part of the setting.

This behaviour illustrates the curiously open nature of Trout River. As in Cat Harbour it was entirely possible that the women sent the children, especially younger ones, to other people's houses and to the Argin' Ground as well. Faris notes that the pre- adolescent children of Cat Harbour would,

... have full run of the community and enter any house without knocking. They form, more than anything else, simply a part of the background- the setting. Either alone or in groups, boys or girls come in without a word and take a seat, sometimes staying up to one hour. They require no

acknowledgment, and during the entire time will say nothing, simply listen (Faris Cat Harbour 239).

Bearing this description in mind, I asked another informant Heber White, whether the children would be seen on the Argin' Ground because it appeared to me that children could infiltrate any place as long as they were 'seen and not heard.' Heber confirmed this and indicated how:

\*We used to go up there and play -- we used to have -- we'd put down -- duck -- a big rock. A Flatter, and then you'd get another rock and put on the flatter. You'd get another rock and pitch (*throw*) it and knock'n off. Then you'd be at that so long -- then you'd go down on the beach and play puss (Crocker #1).

So games were played by children on the periphery of the Argin' Ground, though likely close enough to overhear. Occasionally some of the men themselves at this spot would join in and pitch buttons or pennies, which is played like the game of marbles.

While talking to Minie and Delilah I asked them about their remembrances of the Argin' Ground. Both Delilah and Minie said they remembered their fathers going there when they were young children, maybe 12 to 14 years old. At the time of the interview in 1992, Delilah was 82 years old and Minie was 80 years old. Minie had this to say;

\*Like the men Argin' -- they'd have their pipes -- they all used to smoke pipes then, and they'd -- have their tobacco, and they'd cut off their tobacco -- off with a knife, or pinch it off, and put it in their pipe -- and then they'd sit down, and they'd have a knife, and what they'd call skiddle then. They'd have a piece of wood and they'd cut that down right sharp.

They was hav' in a grand time then -- Argin' -- probably about one fellow got too much fish for the other fellow, -- and then another fellow cut too much wood -- that's the way of the Argin' Ground.

Probably 12 or 15 . If an argument came up, you know -- got a bit rough they would gather to see what it was all about.

*(Delilah)* When the lobster fishery was on he'd live over there.

*(Minie)* You could see the smoke go up a half mile away! she laughs. Some of the men was there most of the time, the older men.

*(Delilah)* There were flakes and stores (*sheds*) there -- spread plenty of fish on the flakes.

*(Minie)* I went in the garden.

I went on the flake with fish.

I card and spinned wool.

I done everything. (Crocker #12).

It seems that there was nothing that escaped the notice of the men who went to the Argin' Ground and by the same token there was nothing that wasn't talked about there. Combined with the frankness displayed in Trout River the importance of the locus as a transmission medium becomes clear. Such openness would facilitate conversation and the volume of information exchanged during the interchanges would have been increased. From the late 1800s until the end of World War II the Argin' Ground would have been the primary source of information in terms of both quality and quantity. As the very first man that I spoke to, Heber White, noted:

\*He (*Grandfather Luke*) used to go up there. The old flake was along there.

They had sticks along there and they used to take out their knives and skiddle for hours and hours and hours, all this little fine skiddy stuff and ah talk -- about one thing and another -- about cattle and sheep and horses and fish. You name it and they talked about it, and then they'd get into an arg' about something (*laughs*). That was the best of it! (Crocker #1)

Heber White goes on to say that although the old men are long gone there are still men of his generation- 67 years- and a few younger ones who hang around the fish stores

and 'talk about the weather and the wind and the sea and the fish.' I then asked him if anyone 'owned' that piece of land or whether or not it was communal. His response was that Uncle Jess Crocker had owned it when he was young and had built a fish store there. He also confirmed for me that there were fish flakes all around that area; 'they had sticks along there and they used to take out their knives and skiddle for hours and hours and hours, all this little fine 'skiddly stuff' (Crocker #1).

It was later in the summer when I went to interview George, who was about 40 years old, and he told me about how when he was a young fellow he used to go out and pick up the skiddles that had been left in the sand. He then used them for starting the fire in the wood stove in the morning as the small shavings made excellent tinder. George's father Tom Crocker had owned a store next to Uncle Jesse's and Tom and his family had owned a house directly across from the Argin' Ground. Also across from the gathering spot was a store that was owned by another of the Crocker brothers, Uncle Willie. Uncle Willie later sold his store to Charlie Butt who had a shop<sup>22</sup> there with a lot of fish flakes, the very ones that Alex White once stole fish from. As mentioned the large number of fish flakes in the area practically made them part of the landscape as Heber White indicates:

\*All the flakes would go around the brook area - - the Barnes had them and the Brakes and out around The Point to the fish store (*present*

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It should be noted that store was the name for the sheds that contained the fishing gear, nets, etc. while a shop was where people bought their dry goods, provisions and other supplies.

*fish store*) Charlie Butt had them. All down along there they had flakes. Right from down on The Point right down -- the bottom.

They had them up to the high water mark, where the water wouldn't come in.

When the water used to come in on the road -- houses had water coming in under them, even ice would clump up under the houses (Crocker #1).

The men gathered around this spot, sitting or leaning on the flakes and then when the flakes eventually disappeared with the introduction of keeping the fish on ice, only a few pieces of wood from them remained, and so the men would sit on these remnants.

Since this place was known as the Argin' Ground I also felt it necessary to inquire about what would happen when these arguments were not peaceful, when they might end up in conflict. I asked Alex about this.

\*They' d have some cruel times down there . Arg, row, fight  
They would bring in the rum. One crowd would land it, and bury it -- and another crowd would go behind them and steal it.  
They would bring it home and give it away and sell it --  
That black rum -- wherever we could get a place to bury it -- up along the shore (Crocker #29).

Crocker's store loft on the Argin' Ground is one of the places the men would drink. For though most of Trout River life was conducted in the open, the drinking was concealed. Although the Argin' Ground was not an area generally known for fighting, there were a few scraps that endured in the memories of the people. When I visited Claren Brake she told me about one particular occasion that she remembers from her childhood:

\*When Joey Smallwood got in, when they went under

Confederation -- the same day -- sure Neddy Sheppard and all them -- sure they was goin' kill our crowd, up there on The Point -- they had a dozen fights sure that day.

There were a lot here (*in the community*) who didn't want Confederation. And they knew that daddy and all our crowd was Liberals ahey. They had a cruel racket about that. They fought like dogs. They barred Uncle Lance in his store and wouldn't let him out (Crocker #34).

Variations of this story were told by others in the community and this fight seems to have been a rather prominent event. According to what I heard Uncle Lance was as strong as a lion and when they barred him in his store he broke out and came after them with a pitch fork saying, 'Don't come a step closer' (Crocker #34). Politics has always been one of the favoured topics of conversation. Another of my informants spoke about Orangeman's Day. Apparently, the men would be drinking at home and someone would always have a fight on the Argin' Ground. Also, many informants said that even if the men were farther up the coast fishing they would all come home for the 12<sup>th</sup> of July.

I asked if men fought for religious reasons - in every case the answer was 'no.'

So I went to the archives and Internet to find out more about Orangemen's Day. I found the following, excellent explanation of the event and a brief history:

Actually, Orangemen's Day was celebrated yesterday, July 12, to honor members of the Orange Society (later known as the Orange Order), formed in 1795 by Protestants in county Armagh, Ireland, to work for the continuation of British rule and Protestant supremacy in Ireland. The society was named for King William III of England -- aka William of Orange -- who destroyed the political power of Irish Roman Catholics. Unfortunately, the Orangemen were charged with anti-Roman Catholic bigotry, and British authorities forced them to suspend their activities in 1836. In 1885, British Prime Minister William Gladstone declared in favor of Irish home rule. At this time, the Orange Order revived and

gained many new members, especially in Ulster. The most important holiday of the society is celebrated on July 12, anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, in which William III won control of Ireland (Mckim).

The Loyal Orange Association in Newfoundland was also organized to unite Protestants, but here it was initially in opposition to the Benevolent Irish Society on the Avalon. It grew to encompass most of Newfoundland and between the late 1800s and the mid-1900s it was active in politics, as well as engaging in other more charitable activities (Colbourne 381-384).

It makes little sense that members of a community where there were no Catholics would choose to fight –especially on that day every year. Nonetheless, one of my informants George Crocker related the following story to me about Orangemen’s Day:

\*The Orangemen used to get ready have a big thing, a big party for the parade, and a social - - we used to call ‘a time.’

Sure shot about 8:30, 9:30 p.m. a fight would take place between the Brakes and the Crockers. Oh, they used to have some wicked fights. (*I asked him what they would fight over and George said*) everything. The Orangemen would parade in the afternoon. If someone passed them on the road and they laughed, then that’s all right, nobody said nothing about that, until they got a few bottles of homebrew in, then up she went (Crocker #19).

Dr. Philip Hiscock also gives a very good description of ‘Orangeism’ in Newfoundland in his capsule discussion on the topic in Gale Burford’s anthology Ties That Bind. Just as George described some of the activities of that July day, Hiscock describes it this way:

The ‘time’ which took place annually was one part of a day-long string of events beginning with a general Protestant church service in the



morning, and a parade of members in ceremonial dress through the streets of the community. In most communities the parade was on foot and, when possible, led by a white horse on which was mounted a man as King William (fondly referred to as King Billy) himself. (Burford 132)

All communities involved in the Loyal Orange Lodge would have had varying degrees of entertainment similar to what has been described.

#### **Chapter 4: Social Change and the Argin' Ground**

Thus far we have looked at the historical context of the Argin' Ground, its location, relevance, and function. What remains to be considered are the changes it has undergone and its contemporary significance. I will examine these questions in three stages, beginning with a discussion of the pervasive influence of the absorption of Trout River and adjacent communities into the newly created Gros Morne National Park.

## **Section I. The Park**

Gros Morne National Park is located in Western Newfoundland and encompasses the entire Bonne Bay region as well as a large tract of land to the east that contains a portion of the Long Range Mountains. The park runs north past Cow Head on the coast and also embraces the bay of St. Paul's Inlet and also Shallow Bay. It is generally accessed by tourists who make the ferry crossing from mainland Canada to Port aux Basques then drive north on the Trans Canada Highway to Deer Lake. Here, the route 430 highway begins and runs north all the way up the Northern Peninsula to St. Anthony (**Figure 4.0**). All along this route there are places for hiking, camping and sightseeing, both inside and outside of the communities not directly included within the Park boundaries. These enclaves remained within municipal limits when control of the land was officially transferred from provincial to federal jurisdiction in 1973 ([Gros Morne National Park Home Page](#)). There is a second highway, route 431 which diverges from its parent and runs down the southern side of Bonne Bay, to the community of Woody Point. It is this road that continues in through The Gulch to Trout River and the campsite located south of the town.

According to Kevin McNamee the park covers 1805 square kilometres, or 722 square miles (McNamee 149). Within this vast tract of land are five communities, Rocky Harbour, Woody Point, Trout River, Cow Head and Wiltondale. There are also five vehicle accessed sites, one of which, Trout River Pond Campsite is located south of the

**Figure 4.0**

A map of Gros Morne National Park.

Figure 4.0



A map of Gros Morne National Park. McLeod, Pat. Gros Morne: A Living Landscape. St. John's: Breakwater, 1988. 25.

community and can be reached by a bridge over the Feeder, or the section of the river where it first emerges from Trout River Pond ([Gros Morne National Park Home Page](#)). McNamee also notes that there are 70 kilometres of trails within the park as well, one of which runs to a location named Green Gardens (**Figure 4.1**) to the north of Trout River ([Gros Morne National Park Home Page](#)). This trail actually has two separate hiking routes, depending on the level of difficulty the hiker wants to engage in.

The park was conceived in the 1960s and the area was studied for almost a decade before plans were actually enacted. However, there was considerable opposition for the scheme that is only hinted at when McNamee suggests the park was created, ‘in principle’ in 1970 (McNamee 149). For many community residents who would be affected by the implementation of the park it meant total relocation, the destruction of their homes and quite possibly the loss of their way of life. At best it meant picking up their way of life in a new environment with new competitors and unfamiliar territory. Such was the case with the town of Lomond which was completely erased with only park buildings that remain today. In the end the people of towns like Woody Point, Cow Head and Trout River itself at least were able to defend their claim of keeping their home and community intact.

In the summer of 1992 while I was asking about the Argin’ Ground, I also asked about the establishment of Gros Morne National Park. One of my informants, Gilbert Crocker related this story to me:

**Figure 4.1**

A picture of Green Gardens.

Figure 4.1



Green Gardens. Gros Morne National Park Web Site. 21 Jan. 2001.  
<http://www.newcomm.net/grosmorne/>



\*(Gilbert) We used to grow our gardens, out on the hill.

The Park trail, see, is out there on The Point. It took in my land and I wasn't satisfied to make away with it, ahey; and the sheriff came up from down to St. John's and paid me \$900 for me land. I wasn't satisfied to make away with it, see. 'Take it or leave it,' he said. They (*The Park*) were goin' to take it anyway. So I took it. I had no say in it.

(Author) Why did they have to take all that land anyway?

(Gilbert) They took too much land, the Park did. They came too handy.

(The Park) tried to get you out of it. They got it all in the Pond. They owns the two ponds.

(Author) Did the people sign anything permitting this to happen?

(Gilbert) No, nope. Well that's the government, see. The Park couldn't take it on their own but the government - - well whatever they wanted they were goin' to take (Crocker #8).

People who spoke about it seemed to feel that the regulations put in place as a result of its inception were more of a hindrance to their way of life than a value. They were also forced by the government to sell land that had been allotted for the park often receiving only small sums of money in compensation. They were told that if they did not agree to the sale of their land then it would be taken anyway, in which case compensation might have been much, much less or nothing at all. One of the people that I interviewed that summer was sixty-four-year-old Trepina (Phenie) Crocker. She had this to say about the park:

\*Before the Park came through you could catch rabbits over there (*in The Gulch*).

Now you can't. You can't even get a license to catch rabbits over there (*in Park territory*).

Scatter time we goes over and sneaks a scatter one. You can't get a license anywhere - - for moose either - - inside the Park.

So the boys, who all have moose license, have to go to Central Newfoundland - - Springdale area, and down the coast (Crocker #24).

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1992 I spoke with Stella and Harve Hann, and I asked them as well about the impact of the park on the community and the people (Figure 4.2). They noted that one or two people had been employed at the park entrance to the campground, and a couple had worked in clearing brush for trails, but that no other work had been generated. Harve said to me:

\*Another year and they (*the Park*) won't allow you to do nothing -- can't take a three wheeler through the Park -- the winter they stopped skidoos from goin' in -- they have to take them in truck in to the road where you goes across to Chimney Cove Brook (Crocker #14).

At that time the Park did not have any organized activities in the wintertime around the Trout River area, except the enforcing of its regulations. Harve went on to say:

\*They owns all the pond -- 4 or 5 miles out past the pond -- they burned the camps up there -- we used to saw lumber up there. (*They had to move them*)

Some of the land was owned by Bowaters, they took that too (Crocker #14).

Such practices of resettlement, seizure or forced sale of land and the literal destruction of entire communities seems a harsh way to achieve environmental conservation. The establishment of the park did enable preservation of wilderness areas in near pristine condition and the protection of endangered wildlife species, thus ensuring that these resources could be enjoyed by future generations. However, the conservation objectives of the National Parks embrace more than the natural histories of protected areas:

**Figure 4.2**

Stella Hann, Stuart and the author in the top picture, Toss White in the bottom picture.

Figure 4.2



The author with Stella Hann and Steward Crocker. Photograph by author. 1992.



Toss White. Photograph by author. 1992.

Behind every national park, and each scene within it, there's a story. There is the natural history of an area - how a valley was shaped by glaciers, how the mountains were created, how the forest evolved, and how it supported the evolution of life. And there is human history - of the Haida of Gwaii Haanes and the Inuvialuit of Ivavik, of the explorers and railwaymen in Rogers Pass, and of century old fishing villages in Gros Morne and Forillon. They help us understand how previous generations perceived, used, and exploited or protected the Canadian landscape and all its native wildlife (McNamee 202).

The community of Trout River and its people have a story too. It is a story of emigrants who came across the sea from the British Isles to a new land, new opportunities and new hardships. Survival was more difficult but in the early years it was a place where men depended on and respected the natural resources. In the past thirty years however, with advances in technology the ability to totally pillage the natural resources of the sea to the point of near extinction was made available. The Trout River story involves the hardships that the people have had to endure as a result of mismanagement of the ocean species, and also the difficulties they have faced with the loss of their pluralistic lifestyle as their land was appropriated by the Park.

In the end the park had to be accepted and the people of Trout River had to adapt again. They will likely be more supportive of programs to care for the land around them, given the condition of the fishery at the present time.

It is in this limited condition, hemmed in on the ground and denied the resources of the ocean, that the people of Trout River find themselves today. So they have expanded their economic pluralism to include tourism.

The residents of Trout River have now taken advantage of a natural resource, in this case a protected one to make a living, or at least part of a living. The Park with its beautiful scenery (**Figure 4.3**), draws tourists with money to spend and a niche opens up for those who want to sell them everything from gas and food supplies for motorhomes, to ice cream and take-out meals for those simply driving through for a look around. Even for those who want to stay for a few days there are cabins located close to Trout River Pond that can be rented. People have made crafts, like long fishermen's socks and white mittens, knitted sweaters, built miniature dories<sup>23</sup> and lobster pots; all things they needed to ensure their survival in earlier times.

The miniaturization of once functional artifacts which are now commodified for tourist consumption is a phenomenon common to other parkland communities. It has been extensively documented by Mary Hufford who offers the following observations on the Barnegat Bat Sneakbox, a traditional boat design native to the New Jersey Pinelands;

When miniaturized and given to friends and descendants it becomes a metaphysical vessel, a means of transit into past worlds. The miniature sneakbox offers a way of "inscribing culture on the threshold of its disappearance." It encapsulates the collective memory of a generation that knew well how to ply a vanishing landscape ..... We often find tools formerly used to ply the physical world transformed into tools that encapsulate it, a way of materializing what now only exists in memory. In miniatures, the encapsulating tools are diminished in size and amplified in significance, a means of transporting aging gunners mentally into the

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The DNE describes a dory as, "A small flat-bottomed boat with flaring sides and a sharp bow and stern, providing both stability in the water and easy storage in stacks on deck, used especially in fishing with hand-lines and trawls." This corresponds to the term as used in Trout River.

**Figure 4.3**

Picture of the 2 ponds with The Narrows well visible.

**Figure 4.3**



The Narrows in Trout River Pond. Gros Morne National Park Web Site. 21 Jan. 2001.  
<http://www.newcomm.net/grosmorne/>



marshes, while transmitting regional identity to children and grandchildren. For the men in the Bull Room the miniature sneakboxes offer a way to retain what is disappearing due to over development, wetlands preservation, and pollution (Hufford One Reason 57).

Hufford elsewhere observes that;

A central task of cultural conservation is to discover the full range of resources people use to construct and sustain their cultures. Knowledge of this sort might be applied in supporting local groups as they manage environmental change and in planning for the full range of governmentally sponsored services that affect the education, health, and general welfare of a culturally diverse population .... Viewing environmental and culture as an indivisible whole, and viewing environmental planning as cultural practice, the ethnographic perspective can redress the fragmented state of cultural affairs and the homogeneous images of culture produced through centralized planning (Hufford Conserving Culture 4).

The items crafted by the people of Trout River are sold to tourists and also to a larger market, which is accessed by joining the large and popular craft industry that exists in Newfoundland. There are even signs that the governments, provincial and local, are realizing that tourism is going to be the way of the future, at least for a time. In 1999 money was made available for a board walk to be erected across the beach front, almost a mile long, where people could stroll and look at the beach and bay.

## **Section II. Changing Contexts**

I have already touched on the changes that have taken place, and are still taking place in Trout River. In Chapter 2 I illustrated the world of the people of Trout River as it has existed for the two centuries since its inception.(Figure 4.4) In recent years the cod moratorium has fundamentally changed the economy of Trout River. The loss of cod as well as the reduction of other fish stocks have become part of the community fabric. I have also indicated the changes that have been brought on by the appearance of the park, which is now perhaps the defining external force in the region. The park's presence has constrained the freedom the people had previously to exploit the land for their own uses as they saw fit. Perhaps the main change I have yet to consider is the change in the amount of leisure time available to community members and the ways in which that time is used.

Why is this important? Simply put, the Argin' Ground was a medium for the transmission of information and as I will go on to discuss that social function has now been attributed to many different places and agencies rather than being vested in a single social context restricted to one physical setting. The reasons for this development are numerous but economic and technological changes can be cited as major factors.

It is now necessary to consider contemporary social dynamics within the community. The changes in the methods of making a living have altered from forming patterns of occupational pluralism of multiple fisheries, logging, and agriculture to a

**Figure 4.4**

Two pictures of Trout River, comparative for past vs. present.

**Figure 4.4**



A picture of Trout River in the 90's. Trout River, Newfoundland Web Page. 21 Jan. 2001

<<http://www.k12.nf.ca/jakeman/troutriver/community.htm>>



A postcard of Trout River from the late 1960's or early 70's. Note the fewer buildings, especially on the plateau, as well as the new buildings on the wharf. Postcard by Bonne Bay Crafts.

pluralism of rare fishing, some basic subsistence home production, make work projects and unemployment insurance. This is a change from what might be considered a dual economy to a treble economy, the new element being government assistance. It is a situation that Omohundro describes in his depiction of subsistence agriculture in Northern Newfoundland (Omohundro 79). The result is that the typical resident of Trout River has a great deal more time on his or her hands with which to engage in recreational pursuits. This is evident in the changes in both youth and adult activities (**Figure 4.5**).

Currently young people tend to occupy themselves by going to school, partying, going out drinking or just 'hangin' out'. With mandatory education, going to school is very similar to having a full time job, at least in terms of the commitment of time. This time would have been in the past taken up with chores around the house or for those 14 years of age and older work, in fishing and fish processing. While the demands on time for these two things for youth are roughly the same there is obviously an entirely different perception regarding each of them.

Having a party or drinking, on the other hand are things that were done in the past and are still done now. While not mutually exclusive one can be done without the other but more often they are joined into a single event. Current parties generally tend to be held at someone's house where youth listen to taped music, drink (or not), and generally socialize. Similarly, a school dance or other musical venue can also be attended but is considerably more rare than the average party. Further, for those who simply wish to

**Figure 4.5**

A picture of a boy catching caplin. While no fishery for it people did it for food and fun.

Figure 4.5



Young boy catching caplin, date unknown. Trout River, Newfoundland Web Page. 21  
Jan. 2001 <<http://www.k12.nf.ca/jakeman/troutriver/community.htm>>.

drink and talk they can go to someone's house, or if significantly underage, to an out of the way spot, either on the beach or 'off in the woods'.

In contrast, during the heyday of the Argin' Ground parties were called scoffs<sup>24</sup> and entailed some degree of petty theft of vegetables and animals for a cooked meal and then eaten, though not necessarily with the consumption of alcohol. These scoffs did not correspond to any specific date on the calendar and could take place any night of the week depending on the group of people involved. When I did my research I asked people about scoffs and in all cases it was indicated to me that it was a spur of the moment thing. Music, when it occurred, would have to have been performed by individuals with instruments rather than the automated recordings currently used. While I was interviewing people I was told by many individuals about the scoffs they used to have, but one of the best examples came from Mona McLean.

It was on the evening of August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1992, that I found myself sitting at her dining table with her and her husband Bert. She told me about the preparation for one of the nights that they needed some fresh meat, in order to have their scoff of meat, vegetables and maybe a game of cards. Two other people were assigned the job of getting the hens. It went like this:

\*Eileen and Eva went in through Uncle George's barn window to

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<sup>24</sup>

The DNE describes a scoff as, "A cooked meal at sea or ashore, especially at night and often part of an impromptu party, such a repast prepared with 'bucked' or stolen ingredients." In Trout River the term referred primarily to the second case, that is ashore and always in terms of a party.



get those two hens - - and Uncle George was in there - - but he never caught them though (*laughs*). Each one got a hen and out through the window, out in the sand.

The hens' pen and the barn was all in one - - the hens was pardoned off - - they went through the window and out in the Beach - - and he happened to be in there and it was night. He had an old lantern; you know them old lanterns when they got smoked up you couldn't see. So the two of them went through the window with a hen each.

When they got them hold see, and nipped 'em (around the neck) they didn't make a sound.

He heard something, but he didn't know what.

They went in fast but they came out faster! (*They had to rush so they wouldn't get caught*).

Sometimes there would be a card game too while they waited for the scoff to cook (Crocker # 26).

This type of petty theft by teenagers was not uncommon, and in small amounts tolerated by the community as a whole. In some cases the entire scoff would be composed of ill gotten gains, vegetables, meat and alcohol! As I mentioned earlier, scoffs and drinking were not mutually exclusive. However, because of the type of economic pluralism practised these activities were likely to be gender exclusive. This was because for many months of the year there might be no men in the town at all, or conversely no women at the temporary work sites. Mona McLean told me a story about her and her friends drinking homebrew as well.

\*Uncle Lance made a barrel, see. You knows Uncle Lance's old house? He made a big barrel, see, and everybody was gone cause it was in the fall. All except Lionel. Lionel was home because Minie (*his wife*) was sick that fall. He was the only man that was here in Trout River.

We was young girls, like, me and Rowena - - a few more of us Dulse, Eileen - - we decided that we was going to get up on Uncle Lance's hen's pen and go in through the porch window and sample he's dog berry wine.

Catherine was with us too.  
We got in through - - sampled he's wine.  
It was froze all around - - you know - - all out around the barrel  
was froze - - on the inside.  
But in the centre, this is where the alcohol was too, this wasn't  
froze.

It only used to sesh over - - like, you know - - each night. So we  
used a cup to break that.

So we cleaned so many gallons out of he's wine.

By the time he was comin' down from the Arm, it was in the fall of  
the year - -  
we said - - well, I guess we better fill up the barrel - - see we filled it up  
with water, see.

The hole was still open see, so a lot of his wine was missing see.  
We didn't put in the amount of water for what we drink see.

He blamed it on Lionel. He was ready to kill him. 'I know's what  
you was doin' all fall', he said, 'drinkin' my dog berry wine.'

We never told a soul for some time later - - we told Aunt Minie, but  
she wouldn't tell (Crocker # 26).

At the time most alcohol came in the form of homebrew, whereas now it tends to  
be purchased from the corner store on demand. These activities are similar to those that  
took place in Cat Harbour, as described by Faris:

Weddings and Christmas are the only times at which community-  
wide drinking and saturnalia are really sanctioned. Individuals may have  
birthday parties and 'scoffs,' at which there will often be liquor, but these  
occasions may be frowned upon by others (especially by those not invited  
who wished they had been). A birthday is usually the excuse for a scoff if  
it comes in the autumn or early winter, for at this time, new vegetables,  
fresh moose, wild duck, and geese are available.

These times consist of three or four, or sometimes five couples of  
the same 'race' who all contribute something to the late supper, the scoff.  
They play cards, perhaps parlour games, and the men (rarely the women)  
drink. The climax of the evening is the scoff which invariably consists of  
potatoes, turnips, cabbage, salt beef, salt pork, and the main fresh meat  
such as moose or duck.

Apart from the drinking, the scoff is an occasion for considerable

sexual joking and licence with wives and husbands other than one's own, both men and women taking the initiative. Traditionally the ingredients for a scoff are 'bucked,' that is taken, from someone else's garden or cellar (or, in the case of moose, taken from the carcass hanging in another's fish store). Bucking for a scoff is sanctioned within limits; it is not 'stealing' for a 'meal.' But if others are not invited, if there are no cards, drinking, or licence, then taking these items for a late supper would be regarded as stealing. It is a transgression of the moral order about which community pressures, opinion, and gossip would begin to operate. (Faris Cat Harbour 162)

For adults the situation was much the same as for the youth, except the possession of supplies for scoffs tended to be a somewhat more legitimate. Perhaps the biggest difference was in the additional adults' pursuit of 'frolics,'<sup>25</sup> a kind of communal work activity and the social events that accompanied it. One example of this was wood frolics. In wood frolics, a group of people, always men, would go into the woods and cut all the wood someone needed for their stove for winter, or for some other project, like building a store or boat. All of the men would gather up their oxen and sleighs and head into the woods, spending the day labouring to get the materials back out to the home of the person holding the frolic. After the day's labour the person who had held the frolic would supply the homebrew for the party afterwards, along with a meal as well. There were other types of frolics also, such as spinning frolics, where women would come together to spin yarn, knitting frolics, where they would knit needed clothes, and matting

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<sup>25</sup>

Though not in the Dictionary of Newfoundland English, the term appears to be a Newfoundland one and refers to specific work done by a group of individuals, usually divided along gender lines. Frolics are characterized by the entertainment and interaction value that are part of the event, especially after the work is completed.

frolics, where they would make mats for their homes.

Frolics were ostensibly for the purpose of getting a lot of work done at a single sitting, but were also times of socializing and enjoyment. From what I have been told they were also totally gender specific, with women having their frolics, revolving around 'women's work' and men's frolics revolving around 'men's work'. It also seems that there were many more women's frolics than men's frolics. I suspect this was due to the fact that women were all together when the men were away for work, and also because the work they did could more easily be accommodated within the confines of a house with minimal preparation.

This type of activity is considerably more rare now, with the advent of electricity, oil heating and the loss of woodlands to the park. Nowadays adults occupy themselves with other activities, one example of which is darts as Stella Hann described to me.

\*Go on Wednesday night

Ten teams, eight on each team.

The men used to go on Tuesday nights.

Eight teams.

They changed it from Tuesday to Friday because some of the men used to work and they couldn't get there so they changed it.

We started in September and went until March or April, then we would have a party.

One week we would go up and play with one team, the next week we would play with the other.

In the spring you would play off to see who had the best team.

Young and old together.

Mostly young

Everybody used their own darts (Crocker #15).

The popularity of darts is derived from the convergence of two recent

developments in community life: the increasing accessibility of consumer goods and the advent of commercial drinking establishments. Mass produced commercial items like darts were not available in Trout River to any notable degree until the mid-1900s likely not until the first automobile road was put through. The transportation system then allowed much easier access to the entire island, which meant access to the growing commercial markets and distribution system that existed there. The introduction of pubs and clubs is reflective of the more widespread changes to patterns of socialization that have fundamentally altered the status and function of the Argin' Ground in the life of the community. This indicates a change in the places where people meet and socialize, something that is of great significance in terms of the Argin' Ground, which I will explain in the next section.

### **Section III. The Role of the Argin' Ground**

The Argin' Ground was many things, but its primary function seems to have been that of a medium for the transmission of information. In this regard it was very effective as its location in the centre of the settlement allowed for immediate access to new information, which would have most likely come in with the fishing boats or schooners. The location was also ideally placed because it was easily accessible to all the men for the community, especially when they were just coming in from a day's work. These men would then disseminate the information to their wives, children, and others who had not yet been to the Argin' Ground. The information that passed through here would also pass through other channels such as women's talk over garden fences, at frolics or at scoffs. It must also be remembered that women passing by or children playing at the Argin' Ground would also take away and distribute information as well. For these reasons alone it is significant to us as folklorists, but the Argin' Ground had a more complex social status.

The Argin' Ground was the primary point of information transfer in Trout River since its emergence sometime in the 1800s. Since then, its role and status were modified but never entirely obliterated by such developments as the wireless telegraph, radio, roads, etc. The arrival of the telephone and television likely caused the ultimate demise of the Argin' Ground. By this time the systems of information transfer within the community and between people had become highly decentralized.

Currently people exchange information and socialize in the local club, at the wharf,

on the telephone, and in half a dozen other locations. There are also impromptu meetings on the road as people will drive through the community in their cars or trucks and stop to talk with whoever they happen to run across. The Argin' Ground therefore, represented a stage in the evolution of global and local information transfer. However, if this were the only significance of the Argin' Ground it would be little more than a footnote, but it is not.

Like many centralized institutions the Argin' Ground exerted a great deal of social control in the community and served the integrative functions enumerated in William Bascom's classic exposition of the functional approach to the study of folklore. The Argin' Ground provided a structural context within which social roles were elaborated and reinforced thereby maintaining the prevailing social order within the community. For example, the constant presence of the place was a symbol of stability in the town. And information that came from it carried the weight of traditional authority. That the place was a 'man's place' as opposed to a 'woman's place' is fairly evident but it also coincides with notions of control and dominance in a patriarchal society. The 'woman's domain' was the home, considered less important though in truth probably the cornerstone of the family and the community as a whole. It became a medium of transmission not just for news and information, but also values, beliefs and attitudes encoded in generic forms of various kinds. By transmitting this information the Argin' Ground was propagating and reinforcing the esoteric beliefs of the group, that is the beliefs the group held about itself. The esoteric beliefs passed on would have been those

of the men who gathered there but also more general opinions and ideas of themselves as people of Trout River and also members of the British Empire, and later, Canada. Their beliefs of what other groups, such as women, children, people from other communities, etc., thought and believed about themselves and also what the men of the Argin' Ground thought about them, that is the exoteric beliefs, would have been transmitted as well. The Argin' Ground thus embodied what William Hugh Jansen terms 'the esoteric-exoteric factor in folklore' (Jansen 45-46).

Material culture also found its place within the context of the Argin' Ground. All the men who went to the Argin' Ground carried a pocket knife. In fact it is very likely that all fishermen carried one because it would have been an item frequently used. They would cut lobster line, rope, and chewing tobacco; however, at this meeting place the knife was used a little differently. Here they 'skiddled,' or 'chiddled' with their knives on a small piece of wood. My informant Marjorie tells it this way;

*(Marjorie)* All them with their pocket knives out -- one of the sides of the handles is gone off (*her husband, Herb's knife*). He gave it to his eldest son and he didn't take it at first. Yes I said, old people that was their treasure their knife -- and they handed it down to their family. This knife was really old. He thought that was the best gift he could give, so he (*his son*) took it home.

*(Marjorie)* Uncle Hayward Barnes before he died he gave his to Bruce, Alice's son, because he (*Bruce*) liked it.

*(Marjorie)* Everyone down there sitting on the Argin' Ground had a knife. That's what they done.

*(Author)* Did they chiddle out anything in particular?

*(Marjorie)* No, no; not then, just a piece of wood and chiddle, 'an chiddle until it was chiddled right away (Crocker #33).



The Argin' Ground served a cathartic function as well, allowing disagreements and aggression to be deflected away from the community through articulation in a socially recognized and controlled context. Transmission through the Argin' Ground also validated and authenticated talk within the community. Perhaps most significant for people now is to understand what the Argin' Ground was, and the place it held in the community. It is a matter of understanding the past and the place it had in the development of the town.

In coming to know the community's roots people can learn why they were and are distinct as a group. In understanding the past they, and I because I came from there too, can begin to discover our own identity in light of our history, and this is essential.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The compilation of an historic ethnographic study of the Argin' Ground was a difficult proposition, a fact I learned early on in the process of doing my thesis. I mentioned in the introduction, one of the primary difficulties lay in the fact that the Argin' Ground as a discreet entity no longer existed. After World War II the rise of technology and the increasing connection to the outside world led to a subtle evolution in the community. The Argin' Ground began to wane as younger generations chose other locations in which to meet and socialize, thus shifting the focus of information transfer from a single central locus to a series of smaller ones. Cars, radio, television, phone and most recently, the Internet, all contributed new media of information transfer. Further none of them demanded a single convenient local place of assembly. In fact some, like the phone and automobile facilitated the evolution of smaller meeting places simply by increasing mobility and effectively shortening the distances between places.

The evolution, and eventual decline of the fishery in 1992 also reduced the prominence of the Argin' Ground. The new fish plant shifted the location for storage as well as the place where fish were sold. Changes in preserving techniques meant the movement from dried and salted fish to fresh frozen fish, which altered the nature of the family based economic unit. Now children were no longer needed to process the fish and the women who worked at the processing now did so in the fish plant. This led to an increase in the level of education children attained from the 1960s onward, and also

brought a level of equality to women in the town as they too joined the ranks of the wage earners. A decrease in gender segregation meant that a gender exclusive location like the Argin' Ground lost some of its ability to maintain its traditional stature in the community.

With the movement of the main fish processing area the Argin' Ground was no longer quite as strategically situated. Not everyone who went out to, or came back from, fishing was forced to pass by the location. Thus, the chance of getting drawn into conversation was reduced and in many cases those who wished to go to the Argin' Ground were forced to go out of their way to attend. Though a subtle change this would have caused further erosion of the status of the meeting place.

However, this was purely the situation regarding the Argin' Ground as a medium of information transfer. This aspect of the Argin' Ground was easy to chart. As I mentioned in the introduction the primary method available to me for data collection was through interviewing people who had seen or been present on the Argin' Ground. Everyone above the age of 30 recalled the location as well as something about the type of place it was, but few had actually participated in the discussions there. Part of this is due to the fact that by 1970 the Argin' Ground was well into decline. Also, at the Argin' Ground the right to speak was accorded those men who were older, roughly 30 plus years old, while younger men would have had very little to say. This placed the age of people who had possibly participated in discussion on the Argin' Ground at approximately 47 years old in 1992. This approximation however, assumes an age of 17

as a minimum age for participation on the Argin' Ground, which is unlikely. Thus, the population of actual participating members available for interview was restricted to the group of men in their late fifties and older. Of course, a great deal of information was available from those informants who had merely observed the proceedings. This was either in the form of individuals being situated on the Argin' Ground such as children playing or young men listening, or women and children passing by. Though the information base was limited I was able to reconstruct a definite idea of the place itself as well as to determine the content of speech, and deduce some of the functions beyond the obvious one of information transfer.

The Argin' Ground was a section of land situated precisely at the base of the sand bar that formed the breakwater where the river empties into the bay. The exact space of land was located to the north of the road or path that went up along the sand bar, upon which the wharf currently sits. This placed the meeting area directly on the spot where the roads converged from up along the beach and from alongside the river itself. This would also have placed it directly across from the old merchant's shop where the fish brought into Trout River would be sold and where supplies and everyday provisions were bought. Consequently, all traffic would pass along directly in front of the Argin' Ground both going out to fish or shop, or coming back in with a catch. A number of fish sheds were also located here along the beach, and it was next to these that the men would stand. In particular there was one shed that the men would use as a wind break on blustery days,

and of which I have a picture dating to approximately 1953. As well, prior to the advent of fresh frozen fish processing there were large areas of ground covered by fish flakes. These flakes were also used as places for the men to sit or lean, even after their use ended. The actual ground at the meeting place was sand, though of a consistency similar to hard packed dirt due to the number of feet pressing it down day after day for over 80 years. This coupled with a generous helping of wood shavings from the constant skidding was the material definition of the Argin' Ground.

As a description of the physical location this is adequate, but place itself is more than simply the physical. As Setha M. Low notes:

*Place is space made culturally meaningful, and in this sense it provides the context and symbolic cues for our behaviour. Place, however, is not just a setting for behaviour but an integral part of social interaction and cultural processes ... Without place conservation, the contexts for culturally meaningful behaviours and processes of place-making disappear, cutting us off from our past, disrupting the present, and limiting the possibilities for the future. (Low 66)*

To people of Trout River today as well as in the past, the 'Argin' Ground' was associated with the centre of the community, its hub as it were. In a very real way this piece of ground was a defining element of the community. The information that was collected and dispersed from here was recognized as being 'from the Argin' Ground,' with all the change of perception and legitimacy that was associated with it. Recollections of this place continue to enable the people of Trout River to construct their present-day cultural world, by framing their community history in a situation analogous to that

described by Henry Glassie with reference to the Irish village of Ballymenone;

History is a prime mode of cultural construction. That is how the history of Ballymenone, or anywhere else, is best addressed: as a way people organize reality to investigate truth to survive in their own terms. (Glassie 652)

Furthermore, although the Argin' Ground is no longer a site for speech events as described in these pages it continues to serve an integrative function for both residents and expatriates by enduring as a land mark in the collective memory. The continuing cultural significance of the Argin' Ground is reflected in the perpetuation of the place name itself. As Mary Hufford has observed,

As tiny texts available for assembling historical discourse, place-names deserve more observation as they are performed (Kuipers 1984). As words that map people and events onto surrounding spaces, place-names assist in constructing "here." (Hufford Context 541)

The 'here' in this case is the Argin' Ground of Trout River and is therefore the performance context for all of the social interaction and cultural production that took place at that spot, at any particular time. This might include the telling of a narrative related to a ship wreck or a joke about something that happened to someone yesterday.

Most of these interactions featured two primary forms of discourse, narrative and rhetoric. In the category of narrative I have included both the typical third person narrative and the personal narrative. In the second case, the stories of individuals about themselves, the tales would have perhaps contained the most reliable information that passed through. Some of these stories I was able to obtain from my informants directly,

and the fidelity of their reproduction is likely to be high as they were the primary character in the story and experienced the events first hand. It is therefore likely that the personal narratives retold to me were very similar to the ones that were told on the Argin' Ground initially. The empirical truth of such stories is open to question as all human tales are, being perspective dependent. This is especially true of memorates and what would be considered in the vernacular as 'fishing stories.' Third person narratives are stories one individual tells about another or others. These may have come through many sources before reaching the Argin' Ground and their authenticity may be suspect. However, the degree of authenticity is less important than the fact that many of the narratives that left the Argin' Ground would have originated there as personal narratives.

The other primary form of discourse on the Argin' Ground was rhetoric. By definition Argin' is rhetoric, a process whereby individuals or groups argue, debate and generally try to bring others to their point of view. This interaction could have had just about anything as its topic, especially in a closed community where new information, or 'news' was rare. Unfortunately, the nature of this interaction and the situational constraints have given me few examples of this type of discussion. Unlike third person narratives and personal narratives, rhetoric is highly variable and lacks the cohesion of the story. The knowledge of the place and its content, however draw enough parallels with other meeting places around the world that have been well studied by other folklorists to allow for the filling in of these gaps. It is from these parallels and from the remembrances

of my informants that I have also linked such things as insults, jokes and proverbs to the interactions that took place there. Also, as noted in section 3.2 I was able to get some idea of the dialect that the men on the Argin' Ground used. Starting from the Dorset home of the first settler and moving through the immigrants into the community I was able to get some idea of the evolution of the dialect. This, coupled with the geographic isolation and the eventual breaking of that isolation through radio, television and the Woody Point road allowed me to get some feel for the closeness of the dialect that existed on the Argin' Ground then, as opposed to what existed now. The work of G.M. Story and Harold Paddock was especially useful in realizing the conservatism and innovation of Newfoundland dialect. Thus, between my informants and the literature I inferred that the dialect of the Argin' Ground of the past, and the dialect of the present would not be appreciably different.

As I mentioned, information transfer was not the sole purpose of the Argin' Ground. While that was probably the most important purpose the place further served as tool, deliberate or not, for the upholding of traditional community values. The separation of the genders was a major one, as was respect for the wisdom of the elderly, both of which have suffered as a result of the gradual dissolution of the Argin' Ground. Further, such things as fishing methods, continuing the local dialect, and maintaining the status quo and other societal ideals common to a small Newfoundland fishing community were also among the values and attitudes transferred and upheld. Additionally the Argin' Ground



was a place where individuals could vent frustration, either violently or otherwise. While violence did occur on the Argin' Ground it was not common, and the second form of venting, catharsis, was the norm. In an isolated community this function is essential as the constant proximity and tangled social relationships can, and very likely did engender some serious social pressures.

But it was all of these things combined, manifest and latent factors both, that constituted the social functions of the Argin' Ground. In the role of information transfer medium, upholder of tradition, site of catharsis, and general gathering place it was a success. As well, it succeeded in embodying the sense of identity of Trout River as it was, and thereby allows us to better understand what it is now.

## **Bibliography and Appendixes**

### **Appendix A: The Crocker Collection of Interviews**

This section is a supplement to the bibliography and includes a listing of the entire series of taped interviews conducted during the research process. Due to the number of tapes involved it was decided to separate the interviews into their own collection and reference them based on their assigned tape number instead of a full footnote. This decision was also influenced by the fact that some interviews covered a number of different tapes, and a collection would allow for quicker primary data referencing. All tapes used were of the same run-time, 90 minutes, and one side was used.

Crocker #1 - White, Heber. Personal interview. 29 June 1992.

Crocker #2 - Crocker, Flora and Isaac. Personal interview. 1 July 1992.

Crocker #3 - Brake, Brazil. Personal interview. 1 July 1992.

Crocker #4 - Crocker, Albert and Romaine. Personal interview. 3 July 1992.

Crocker #5 - Crocker, Charlie. Personal interview. 4 July 1992.

Crocker #6 - Crocker, Basil. Personal interview. 4 July 1992.

Crocker #7 - Barnes, Augustus. Personal interview. 4 July 1992.

Crocker #8 - Crocker, Gilbert. Personal interview. 7 July 1992.

Crocker #9 - White, Toss. Personal interview part 1. 7 July 1992.

Crocker #10 - White, Toss. Personal interview part 2. 7 July 1992.

Crocker #11 - Crocker, Steward. Personal interview. 9 July 1992.

- Crocker #12 - Crocker, Minie . Personal interview. 14 July 1992.
- Crocker #13 - Delilah Duval. Personal interview. 14 July 1992.
- Crocker #14 - Hann, Harve and Stella. Personal interview part 1. 2 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #15 - Hann, Harve and Stella. Personal interview part 2. 2 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #16 - Crocker, Fred. Personal interview. 3 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #17 - Crocker, Fred. Personal interview part 1. 12 Aug. 1992
- Crocker #18 - Crocker, Hersie and Sandra Barnes and Rhoda Barnes. Personal interview. 11 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #19 - Crocker, George. Personal interview. 11 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #20 - Crocker, Fred. Personal interview part 2. 12 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #21 - Barnes, Sandra. Personal interview. 11 and 12 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #22 - Snook, Catherine. Personal interview. 13 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #23 - White, Dulcie. Personal interview. 15 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #24 - Crocker, Tom and Trephina. Personal interview. 15 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #25 - McLean, Bert and Mona. Personal interview part 1. 16 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #26 - McLean, Bert and Mona. Personal interview part 2. 16 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #27 - McLean, Bert and Mona. Personal interview part 3. 16 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #28 -Barnes, Herb. Personal interview. 27 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #29 - White, Alex and Alice. Personal interview part 1. 27 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #30 - White, Alex and Alice. Personal interview part 2. 27 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #31 - White, Alex and Alice. Personal interview part 3. 27 Aug. 1992.

- Crocker #32 - Barnes, Andrew. Personal interview. 27 Aug. 1992.
- Crocker #33 - Barnes, Marjorie. Personal interview. 27 Aug. 1992
- Crocker #34 - Brake, Claren and Hughie. Personal interview. 28 Dec. 1992.
- Crocker #35 - Brake, Eric. Personal interview. 28 Dec. 1992.
- Crocker #36 - Crocker, Rita. Personal interview. 30 Dec. 1992.
- Crocker #37 - Payne, Olive. Personal interview. 30 Dec. 1992.
- Crocker #38 - Penney, Clayton. Personal interview. 17 Nov. 2000.
- Crocker #39 - Healey, Dr. Linda. Telephone interview. 27 July 2000.

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This bibliography is a complete listing of all non-primary data sources, including literary, periodical, electronic and other sources. The primary research data is listed in Appendix A and includes the entire list of interviews that compose what has been divided into the Crocker Collection of Interviews.

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