

THE PLACE OF THE LABRADOR FISHERY IN THE  
FOLKLIFE OF A NEWFOUNDLAND COMMUNITY

CLARA JOAN DOYLE MURPHY RUTHERFORD







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Submitted in partial requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

By Clara Joan Doyle Murphy Rutherford

Memorial University of Newfoundland

2009



## ABSTRACT

This study takes a life history approach to a community study which analyzes the effect of the Labrador fishery on an area comprising several settlements - Colliers, Conception Harbour, Avondale, and Brigus - but focusing on Colliers. The Labrador stationary fishery developed among Newfoundland fisherpeople, principally from Conception Bay, during the nineteenth century. The fishery faltered in the 1940s, revived in the 1960s, and continued into the time of my study with greatly reduced numbers and with structural changes. While this study centers on the traditional fishery, it also deals with the post-1960 fishery and with Newfoundlander and Labradorian relationships past and present.

The bulk of the data used in this work was collected in three main ways: fieldwork, archival survey, and library research. The fieldwork consists of two parts: (1) two field trips to Labrador and (2) fieldwork in the community of Colliers and surrounding areas. The trip to Labrador by coastal boat was undertaken during the month of July 1984. A follow-up visit was made April-May 1986. The experience of taking the coastal boat as a participant observer helped to place the experiences of informants into geographical and cultural context. The tangible results of the trip include two hundred photographs, an inventory of Newfoundland fishermen who were fishing on the Labrador and their fishing stations, six lengthy interviews, and dozens of shorter interviews. A preliminary list has also been compiled of people from Colliers and the surrounding areas who went on the Labrador between 1857 and 1948.

I searched the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) for student collections which deal with the Labrador fishery from the point of view of “floaters” and “stationers”. Respectively, floaters and stationers were fishermen from Newfoundland who prosecuted the fishery either by schooners or from rooms (fishing premises) on the Labrador. To supplement the interviews done in Labrador, I also searched the *Them Days* Archives and its publication, *Them Days Magazine*, a regional oral history magazine, for the point of view of Labradorians on the Newfoundland fishermen.

The archival research revealed five areas of descriptions of trips to the Labrador: (1) “going in collar” (preparing for the trip), (2) “on the passage” (the trip down), (3) work on the Labrador, (4) sociability on the Labrador, and (5) the return to Newfoundland. The narratives presented in the final section of this thesis concern the effect of the annual summer migration on the home community in Newfoundland.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my studies I was assisted financially by a bursary from the School of Graduate Studies, a fellowship from the Institute of Social and Economic Research, and a scholarship from the Women's Association of Memorial University of Newfoundland. Fieldwork was funded by the Institute of Social and Economic Research and the Institute for Northern Studies. Archive assistantships from the Department of Folklore and a research assistantship from Dr. Gerald Pocius not only assisted me financially but also kept me constantly aware of how the Labrador fishery affected all areas of Newfoundland.

Dr. Wilfred Wareham supported and nurtured this project in its infant stage. Dr. Larry Small provided the original idea and the incentive to stay with it. Dr. Martin Lovelace gave up his vacation time to encourage me to keep writing. Dr. Diane Tye took up the battle cry and helped me tie it all together. Jamie Moreira, Melissa Ladenheim, Philip Hiscock, Susan Hart, Lynn MacDonald, Eileen Condon, Barbara Rieti, Kathy Kimiecik, Anita Best, Marie-Annick Desplanques, and Sister Mary Theresa Doyle, P.B.V.M, gave insightful comments and criticisms throughout the preparation of the thesis. John Ryan provided pictures of Colliers which are greatly appreciated.

Eric and Hyra Skogland, Don and Una Saunders, and Richard and Marie Rich provided living accommodations for me in Labrador. Tom Murphy, the Carey and Doyle families, Lynn MacDonald, Susan Hart, and Deanna Skinner provided home life and companionship for my children when I was out in the field. Doris Saunders and Judy McGrath greatly increased my knowledge of the Labrador. Family members, Mom,



Theresa, Vince, John, (my sister) Lynn, Katrina, and Doug financed the writing stage of my thesis. Special thanks are extended to my former employers, Newfoundland and Labrador Council of Archives and the Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archivists, for allowing me to take my annual leave so early into the contract to write the thesis to meet the first deadline.

Many family members and friends supported me emotionally, physically, and financially in sickness and hard times, through my full-time single parent graduate student days, my subsequent days as a part-time graduate - a lifetime of underpaid contract work, overpriced slum housing, broken leg, and all - and life after grad school. My gratitude to them, my husband Doug and to my children, Katrina and Tom, and to my grandson and soul mate Ryan James Douglas Murphy is heartfelt.

This thesis is dedicated to the men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador who lived the fishery and shared their memories with folklore students, and especially to my father who taught me that a job is never finished until the work is done and to my mother whose work is finally done.

Clara Joan Doyle Murphy Rutherford

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 .....	2
History of the Labrador Fishery.....	11
Colliers.....	15
Physical Description of Colliers .....	19
Colliers: Community Life .....	20
Songs.....	23
Religious and Educational History .....	24
Theoretical Approaches .....	26
CHAPTER 2 .....	36
Origins of the Study .....	36
Fieldwork .....	38
The Northern Run .....	44
My Stay at Tickeraluck Point .....	51
The Trip Home.....	55
Fieldwork in Colliers .....	58
Labrador Revisited.....	64
Summary .....	65

CHAPTER 3 .....	68
Going in Collar: Narratives of the Voyage .....	68
Experiences of People from Colliers .....	80
On the Passage .....	84
Sex on the Passage .....	87
Neptune .....	93
Summary .....	95
CHAPTER 4 .....	97
The Fishery in the Nineteenth Century .....	98
The Fishery in the Twentieth Century .....	100
Work Rounds .....	102
Women's Role in the Folklife of the Labrador Fishery .....	104
Occupational Hazards .....	115
Conflict .....	119
Disruptive Tricks .....	127
Interview with James Doyle.....	129
Cooperation.....	131
Blackflies & Mosquitoes.....	134
Supernatural Beliefs.....	136
Summary .....	139



CHAPTER 5 .....	140
Harbour Days .....	140
Songs.....	142
Dances.....	145
Gulching.....	147
Pranks and Practical Jokes .....	149
Stories of Strength.....	152
Games .....	153
Harbour Days: Summary .....	154
The Trip Home.....	154
Narratives of Death and the Supernatural .....	158
CHAPTER 6 .....	165
Final Comments .....	175
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	178
APPENDIX A.....	189
APPENDIX B .....	191
Figures.....	194

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1. Map showing the areas covered in the fieldtrips of 1984 and 1986, as well as key places not covered in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2. Map of Colliers.

Figure 3. Fishing Areas.

Figure 4. An illustration from Herman Moll's map of 1710.

Figure 5. My grandfather's house, the oldest one in Colliers, with Tom Doyle's house in the background.

Figure 6. House located at Tickeraluck Island, Labrador, used for summer fishery.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it aims to document a significant item in the history of Colliers, Conception Bay, a community whose history has not received extensive consideration in printed sources. The second objective is to examine the Labrador fishery from the perspective of the Colliers people who participated in it on a seasonal basis. The thesis has been written from the point of view of a cultural insider, but one who is removed from the community in both time and experience. I am from the community of Colliers, but the local connection with the traditional Labrador fishery ended before I was born.

Essentially, the study explores the role of a small community within the larger framework of the Labrador summer fishery, giving serious consideration to what aspects of folk life were brought into the community by way of the fishery as opposed to what folklore was brought out of the community, as in the case of a study of the seal fishing voyages.<sup>1</sup> Generally, few scholars have discussed the Labrador from a folkloristic perspective, although the subject has been the focus of a few autobiographies as well as popular and academic histories. The work most closely related to the present study is

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Scott, "The Function of Folklore in the Interrelations of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery and the Home Communities of the Sealers," M.A. Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1975



## CHAPTER 1

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Greta (Lear) Hussey's *Our Life on Lear's Room, Labrador*.<sup>2</sup> Because Hussey's father had a little store, she had higher status than most of the people I have interviewed. Nicholas Smith's *Fifty Two Years at the Labrador*<sup>3</sup> provides information about the fishery at Cut Throat Island, where many of my informants fished, from the point of view of a successful captain. His autobiography does not provide as much detail on the work routine as does Hussey's book, and it occasionally summarizes several years in one sentence. Frank Saunders, in *Sailing Ships from Carbonear*,<sup>4</sup> gives more detail on work than Smith and provides the perspective of a principal town involved in the Labrador Fishery. Hilda Murray's *More Than 50%* is an excellent study of the role of women as "work horse" in the traditional fishery in a Newfoundland outport.<sup>5</sup> Shannon Ryan, in *Fish out of Water*<sup>6</sup> examines the production and marketing aspects of the Labrador fishery between 1814 and 1914. The Labrador fishery is also mentioned in the accounts of missionaries and other travelers to the land. Rev. P. W. Browne's *Where the Fishers Go: The Story of Labrador*<sup>7</sup> is the best of these exoteric accounts as it gives eye-witness

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<sup>2</sup> Greta Hussey, *Our Life on Lear's Room, Labrador* (St. John's: Robinson-Blackmore, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Smith, *Fifty Two Years at the Labrador* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1936).

<sup>4</sup> Frank Saunders, *Sailing Vessels and Crews of Carbonear: Stories of the Sea* (St. John's: Robinson-Blackmore, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Hilda Chaulk Murray, *More Than 50%: Woman's Life in a Newfoundland Outport, 1900-1950* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1979). See especially, chapter 2, "Making a Living: The Woman was more than 50%."

<sup>6</sup> Shannon Ryan, *Fish out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade, 1814-1914*, Newfoundland History Series, no. 2 (St. John's: Breakwater, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> P. W. Browne, *Where the Fishers Go: The Story of Labrador* (New York: Cochrane; Halifax, NS: T.C. Allen; London: T. Wener Laurie, 1909).

reports. W. T. Grenfell's *The Harvest of the Sea*<sup>8</sup> also gives an account of a fisherman's life.

Apart from published accounts of the Labrador fishery, there is a wealth of unpublished material on deposit in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive.<sup>9</sup> Much of the data are in the form of personal experience narratives of the men, women, and children who went to the Labrador. They provide many insights into the type of person who could survive the hardships and dangers of the summer fishery. These narratives are of varying degrees of usefulness, as some student collectors did not go into sufficient depth with their line of questioning. The manuscripts examined for this study cover the period 1893-1985, and although few go into details about the actual texts of the folklore genres used, all of them describe social context and give insight into the functions of the folklore.

The opening section of this chapter presents historical overviews of the fishery, and of Colliers and its summer fishing stations "on the Labrador," plus a description of the folklife of Colliers. Subsequent sections summarize the methodological approaches. The folklife of the Labrador fishery, as expressed in narratives, foodways, and folk medicine; an examination and analysis of conflict, both potential and realized, between migratory Newfoundland fishermen and Labradorians; and the conclusions of the research will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

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<sup>8</sup> W. T. Grenfell, *The Harvest of the Sea: A Tale of Both Sides of the Atlantic* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1905).

<sup>9</sup> Hereinafter referred to as MUNFLA.

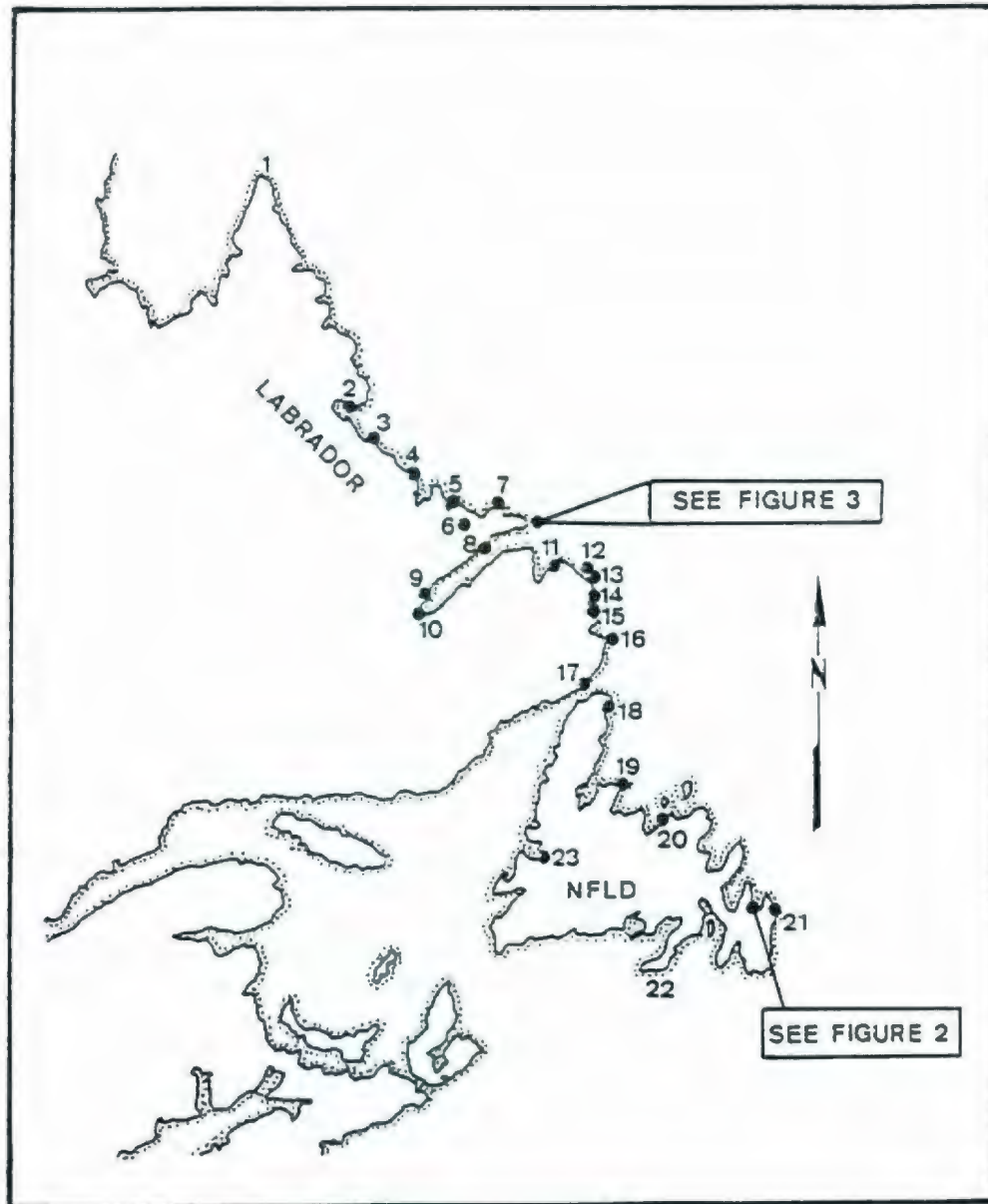


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Figure 1. Map showing the areas covered in the fieldtrips of 1984 and 1986, as well as key places not covered in Figures 2 and 3.

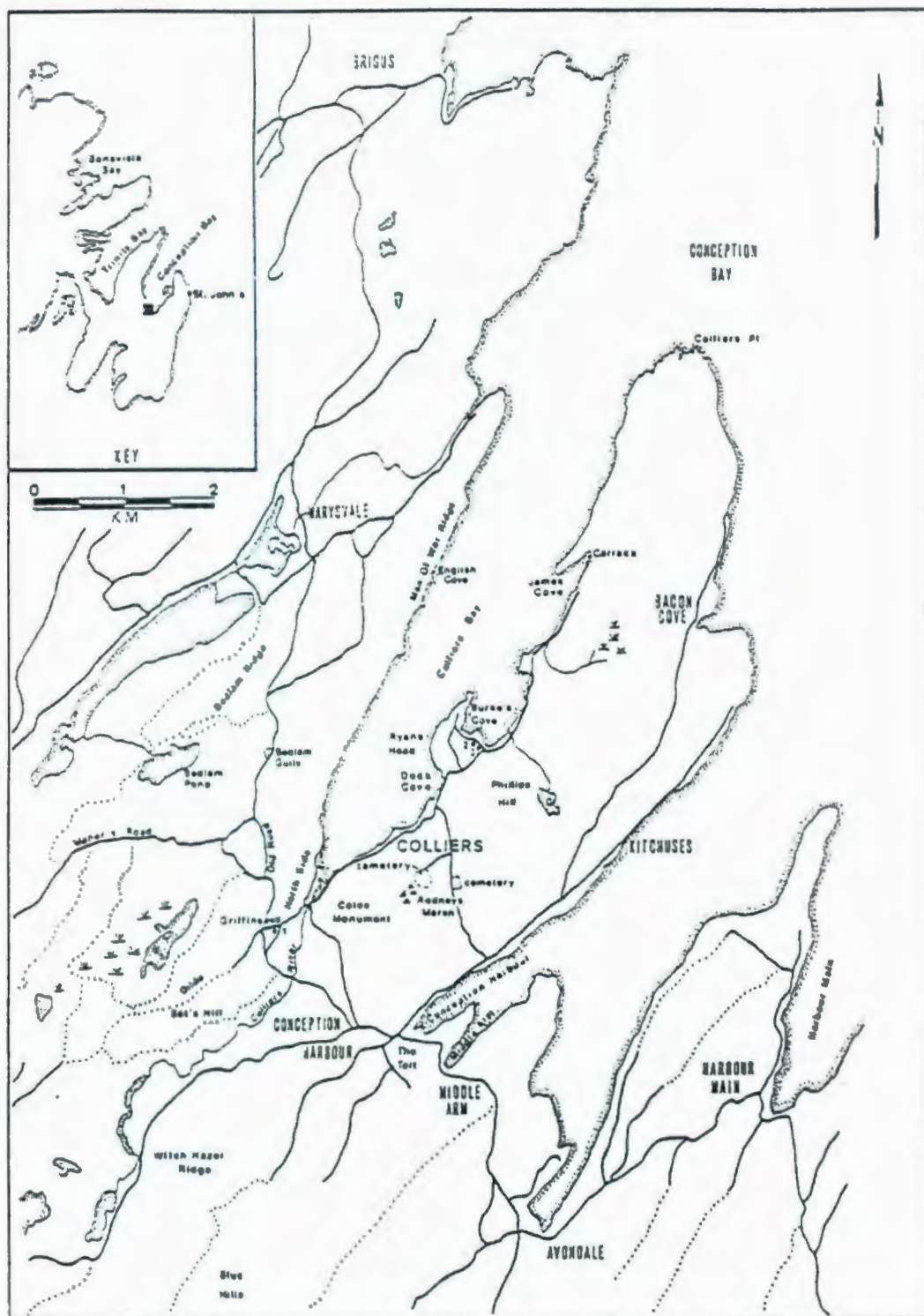
Key:

1. Cape Chidley
2. Nain
3. Davis Inlet
4. Hopedale
5. Makkovik
6. Postville
7. Cape Harrison
8. Rigolet
9. Northwest River
10. Happy Valley-Goose Bay
11. Cartwright
12. Spotted Island
13. Batteau
14. Comfort Bight
15. Hawk Harbour
16. Battle Harbour
17. Red Bay
18. St. Anthony
19. La Scie
20. Lewisporte
21. St. John's
22. Burin Peninsula
23. Corner Brook



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Figure 2. Map of Colliers.





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Figure 3. Fishing Areas.

KEY:

1. Little Holton
2. Dark Tickle
3. Emily Harbour
4. Captain Stephen John Kennedy's Room
5. Doyle's Room (Doyle from Avondale, Room at Little Brig Island)
6. Green Island
7. Fairy Island
8. Long Point
9. Splitting Knife
10. Pig's Eye
11. Smokey Cove
12. Smokey Head
13. Trahey's Room
14. Dalton's Room
15. Doyle's Bawn
16. Bear's Gut
17. Cutthroat
18. Ship's Run
19. Entry Island
20. Five Islands
21. Run By Guess
22. Ice Ticks
23. Electric Splitter
24. Marks Island
25. Smokey
26. Mundy Island
27. Indian Harbour
28. Green Island
29. Big Island
30. Tinker Island
31. Double Island
32. North Duck Island
33. North Green Island
34. Brig Harbour Island
35. Little Brig Island



## History of the Labrador Fishery<sup>10</sup>

Europeans began to establish seasonal fishing stations on the Labrador in the early sixteenth century. Figure 4 provides a graphic description of many aspects of the eighteenth century fishery. Records from this period up until 1760 are full of stories of “guerrilla” raids from the Eskimos (Inuit) in search of iron artifacts, and facilities were often found wrecked when vessels arrived from Europe to begin a new season fishing or whaling. This began to change when Labrador came under Britain’s rule in 1763. While the French still had a series of monopoly grants of fishing stations, the English, under Governor Hugh Palliser’s rule in the late 1700s, pushed the frontier of exploration north to River Charles. Here George Cartwright established a cod, seal, and salmon fishery, a fur trading business, as well as friendly and commercial relationships with the Inuit and Indians (Innu).

Palliser recognized that the Europeans were responsible for much of their conflict with the Inuit, and one of his first acts was to issue strict guidelines for the conduct of British subjects toward native residents. Palliser wrote an angry letter to the Governor of Boston about the atrocities committed by New England whalers in Labrador, and he encouraged Moravian evangelists to set up missions among the Inuit.

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<sup>10</sup> A brief overview is presented here to set the historical context of the research and is derived from secondary sources only. Much of the information in this summary comes from the historical overview of the development of Labrador in Lawrence Jackson’s *Bounty of a Barren Coast: Resource Harvest and Settlement in Southern Labrador*, Phase One (Memorial University, Labrador Institute for Northern Studies, 1982).

Palliser considered Labrador and Newfoundland essentially a fishing station to be exploited by the fish merchants and to be used as a training school by the Royal Navy. This policy resulted in an estimated one hundred English vessels being engaged in the Labrador fishery by 1775. Newfoundland fishing vessels began sailing for the Labrador coast shortly after 1763. During the long period of the Napoleonic Wars, the base of the fishery gradually transferred to Newfoundland ports and became known as the Labrador "floater" fishery, operating principally from St. John's and from the outports of Conception Bay. By 1820, Newfoundlanders had taken over fishing and trading establishments on the Labrador that were formerly attached to firms from England, Jersey and Quebec, and many Newfoundlanders were choosing to live in Labrador. The advent of the Newfoundland fishermen who fished either as land-based family units known as "stationers," "planters," and "landsmen," or as offshore or partially land-based "floaters" (schooner crews with one or two female cooks/salters, who sometimes had a room ashore but could fish farther away from the land), brought Labradorians in contact with a new supply of potential spouses and in addition, provided employees and/or opportunities for employment.<sup>11</sup>

Twelve thousand Newfoundlanders went to the Labrador in the summer of 1890; they outnumbered the residents of Labrador three to one, and they returned again and again to the summer stations they called home. Many Newfoundland children were born

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<sup>11</sup> While I was undertaking fieldwork for this thesis in 1984, the typical Labradorian reaction to my being a Newfoundlander was the lighting up of the eyes followed by something like "my grandmother comes from Carbonear" or "I used to cook for the Newfoundlanders" and "my, how we loved to see the Newfoundlanders coming." See Field notebook 1.



on the Labrador. Rebecca Fanny Mercer was born there in 1889, the daughter of a seventy-year-old fisherman who fished for another seven years until ill health forced him to stop.<sup>12</sup> More than one little boy first went to the Labrador in his mother's arms and returned as a child or a man for upwards of seventy years. Of these men, it was often said that "he wasn't born (on the Labrador) but next to it, well he nearly knew the bottom".<sup>13</sup>

Often, this lore of the Labrador and its fishing grounds was passed down through three or four generations. The majority of the informants interviewed by myself and others did not know when their family's involvement with the Labrador fishery had started but could relate incidents such as the loss of a schooner in 1857<sup>14</sup>, or stated that a fisherman born in 1888 was the grandson of a man who fished on the Labrador all his life.

The earliest known involvement of Colliers in the Labrador fishery is given in the narrative of a sea disaster in which a vessel from Colliers, owned by the Whelans and skippered by a Burke man, was lost on the return trip. The name Burke was given in an 1838 newspaper listing of vessels cleared from Colliers for the seal fishery.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Colliers's involvement in the fishery began by the first half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>12</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-217.

<sup>13</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-325, pp. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Mary B. Whelan informed me that two of my ancestors had been on that vessel. MUNFLA 86-013, C8671. Full details are given in Chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Public Ledger*, March 27, 1838.

Colliers (Figure 2) was chosen as a focus for the study of the Labrador fishery because of its proximity to St. John's, the traditional point of origin for the Labrador run. The location of Colliers in relation to the summer fishing stations on Cut Throat Island gives the community a special status in the folk life of the fishery. People from Colliers were aboard the vessel for a longer period than were families from Carbonear and points farther northwest and west.<sup>16</sup> They would be settled into the routines of the journey even before most other people boarded. Similarly, because the area they fished was in the northern limits of the "stationers" fishery, Colliers's people would also be among the first to board for the return passage. Thus, they had maximum exposure to intergroup relations going to and returning from the Labrador.

The people of Colliers fished primarily in the Smokey/Cut Throat/Indian Harbour area (*q.v.*, Figure 3). Although well-known among fishermen, it is not well documented cartographically. For this reason, and because few of the names used by Colliers people appear on Labrador maps, I asked my husband to draw a map and then asked Tom Doyle to locate the various fishing stations and other topographical features. The names of these places had been given to me by my father, Jim Doyle, before his death. Doyle's Bawn refers to the location used by the Doyles when they had surplus fish; room refers to property owned by the fishermen. The earliest description of a room at Cut Throat Harbour comes from Nicholas Smith's account of property he purchased from Matthew Ryan in 1900.

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<sup>16</sup> Ryan, p.47, Map 3.



He named what he had there, a fishing stage, small hold (about 300 quintals of fish), a bulley, or fishing boat to carry about 300 quintals, a dwelling-house, puncheons and a good bawn for spreading 300 quintals fish.<sup>17</sup>

Browne describes Cut Throat as an attractive locality, "...situated on an island which has a flat summit and is one of the most interesting geologic formations on the coast."<sup>18</sup> The two settlements of Cut Throat and Splitting Knife<sup>19</sup> are both on Cut Throat Island in northeastern Groswater Bay. Splitting Knife was eight or nine fathoms deep, while Cut Throat was a small inlet, shallow at low tide. Smokey is on Mundy Island, which Jim Doyle described as three miles across and three miles long. Nearby, there are a few islands with some runs between them, where Keogh's Cove, Dalton's Cove, Splitting Knife, and Cut Throat Harbour are found. During Jim's first few years on the Labrador, there were two crews in Splitting Knife, one over in Smokey, and a few in Cut Throat.

### **Colliers**

Sandwiched between Conception Harbour and Marysvale, Colliers is believed to have received its name from the first settler, James Cole, or from his former occupation as a collier in England. A headstone in James Cove records that Cole died in Colliers on

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, p. 106; see also photograph, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Browne, p. 279.

<sup>19</sup> The names of both settlements derive from fishing terminology. A description of the work done by the "cut throater" is included under "header" in the Dictionary of Newfoundland English, eds. George Story, et al (St. John's: Breakwater, 1982). A splitting knife has a short curved blade and is used to cut and remove the sound bone from the codfish. Photographs of fishing equipment, the processing of fish, including fish spread on the bawn, and premises of merchant J. W. Hiscock are in Ryan, pp. 321 *et passim*. Photographs of Cut Throat Harbour and Indian Harbour are in Tony Oppersdorff, *Coastal Labrador: A Northern Odyssey* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1991), pp. 28-29 and p. 70.

March 30, 1833, at the age of sixty-three. The community is described in Lovell's 1871 *Province of Newfoundland Directory* as a large fishing settlement at the head of Conception Bay, in the district of Harbour Main, forty miles from St. John's and six miles from Brigus by road. Its population of 480 included sixty-seven farmers, two planters (John Costigan and John Scanlan), and one schoolteacher (James Hearn).<sup>20</sup> Mary Bernice Doyle, in her study of the history of the settlement of the head of Conception Bay,<sup>21</sup> found the first listed inhabitant to be James Hedderson in 1766. By 1803, there were twenty-five people listed, including members of the Cole and Whelan families, who resided there since 1778. These surnames and six more of the fourteen listed are still in existence today in Colliers. Doyle found the population of Colliers to be continually the lowest for all settlements at the head of the bay. Colliers had a population of 301 in 1836, and from 1860 until 1976 the population fluctuated between 400 and 840 with a nineteenth century high of 706 in 1884.

In 1804, there were 49 farmers with 154 cultivated acres, and local production yielded 2,609 barrels of potatoes, 300 cattle, 1,194 barrels of capelin, and 1,220 quintals of cured codfish. According to Doyle, in the earliest days of the eighteenth century the people lived almost totally on herring and potatoes. The inhabitants were first fishermen then farmers, and as there was poor production in the fisheries from 1860 to 1890, most men were farmer-fishermen. Occupational pluralism characterized the working life of the

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<sup>20</sup> Lovell's *Province of Newfoundland Directory for 1871* (1871; London, ON: Genealogical Research Library, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Mary Bernice Doyle, "The History of the Settlement of the Head of Conception Bay," M. A. Thesis (History), Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1971.



community, similar to the circumstances of Thanet, England, described in an eighteenth-century document. The people of Thanet were, the report said,

amphibious animals, who get their living both by the sea and land. ... equally skilled in holding helm or plough, according to the season of the year. They knit nets, catch cods, herrings, mackerel [*sic*], etc., go on voyages and export merchant dyes. The very same persons dung the land, plough, sow, reap, and carry in the corn. They work hard and live hard and are truly industrious.<sup>22</sup>

Besides growing potatoes, the early settlers of Colliers kept sheep, swine, goats, horses, milk cows and cattle. They cut hay and fodder, a late growth of hay produced by setting oats.

According to my older informants, the early inhabitants of Colliers settled first in James Cove, then Burke's Cove, then Colliers proper. The coves were dotted with tiny cottages and Colliers proper was considered "the country." In wintertime, they would build tilts (small, single-roomed huts) in the country and clear the land. In summer during the nineteenth century, stoves would be stored away until fall and a fireplace would be used for cooking.

The early settlers were self sufficient. They produced their own food, made their own clothes, built their own homes, and accepted employment anywhere they could find it. They fished the inshore, on the Grand Banks, on the Labrador, and elsewhere in Newfoundland. From 1860 to 1890, as mentioned previously, there was poor production in the fisheries and local emigration began as men left to find work. Many men and women who left did not come back except for visits. The men went to work in mines in

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Thompson, *et al.*, *Living the Fishing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 13.

Tilt Cove, Bell Island, Buchans, and Nova Scotia. Few men could afford not to go to Bell Island when the mines opened up in 1895. When they came back from the Labrador in the fall, they went to Bell Island, via the steamer from Conception Harbour.<sup>23</sup> In the 1940s, many people worked on the American bases at Fort Pepperell and Argentia. Others laid track on the railway or migrated to the United States or Canada for other employment - the men from Colliers went mostly to Philadelphia and New York. Some would be gone for three years before getting back to their wives and children. Women either went in service on the Avalon Peninsula, particularly on Bell Island, or with the Labrador fishery. Most did not work outside the home after marriage. Several women spent part of their lives as postmistresses, and two women operated a small grocery store.

Starting in the 1960s, people started to move from the coves and the north side to Riverhead and the Ridge, as these were the first areas to receive electricity. Since the creation of the town council in 1976, all areas have electricity, and the roads are paved and lighted. A few houses are still not hooked up to the power lines, and several that are connected and have electric heat still use a woodstove for cooking and as the main source of heat in the kitchen.

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<sup>23</sup> While being interviewed for Gail Weir, ["The Wabana Iron Ore Miners of Bell Island, Conception Bay, Newfoundland: Their Occupational Folklife and Oral Folk History," M.A. Thesis (Folklore), Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1986] my father stated that the foreman would lay off miners to hire on fishermen returning from the Labrador, as fresh workers could handle the long hours in the mines.

## Physical Description of Colliers

Colliers has a complex road system (Figure 2), comprised of the mostly-paved, main road (represented by dark lines), the unpaved roads and footpaths (represented by dotted lines) leading to the inner gardens and the berry grounds. The earliest published account of the community and its former road system that I could find is a 1935 description by W.J. Browne.

Colliers is over the Cemetery Road from Conception.<sup>24</sup> The man who first settled in its little annex, called James's Cove was a lonely fellow, but the fishing was better in his day. Colliers is a large harbour, a part of a bay. The road follows the shore line up to the bridge above the spot where the river flows in.

On the other side is a high perpendicular cliff, with red and blue streaks of mineral on its face.<sup>25</sup> There is Colliers South and Colliers North. At the former the houses are close together, but in the latter they are scattered over the fertile hillside. Colliers must have been an old settlement because of its fine harbour, for, although there is little foreign trade here now, there are old rambling cottages which, like the gentle women of the houses, bear upon their heads the marks of time. The people are warm-hearted and loyal, and like in Ireland, if you enter the house with a "God save all here", you will be met

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<sup>24</sup> Local abbreviation for Conception Harbour, still used today.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Murray's Geological Survey of Newfoundland: Report of Progress for the Year 1881 refers to "specimens of a beautiful blue ore of copper, probably conelline, were shewn [sic] me from Collier's Point, Conception Bay; and native copper in small specks and lumps in a matrix of calispar was produced from the Blue Mountain Tolt near Salmon Cove." Copper mining attempts were made at English Cove and Bat's Hill.



with a "God save you kindly". Now the Highroad which encircles Colliers mounts up the hill and passes the school. From here the view over the valley and harbour of Colliers is exhilarating.<sup>26</sup>

Ewart Young, in his *Album of Avalon*, includes a picture of Colliers. Its caption describes the area as "a very scenic section of Conception Bay and the settlement of Colliers itself is spread over a wide area."<sup>27</sup>

### **Colliers: Community Life**

The work routine was balanced by informal gatherings and socializing with family and friends. Pad Cole, a lifelong resident, gives an overview of the local way of life in Colliers in the following passage:

...everyone was happy. No money, but happy - plenty to eat: vegetables, most people kept a pig, some kept two. In the fall of the year they'll kill a pig. We used to have three or four heads of cattle, horses, cows, small bull. Sometimes father killed one of them. All you wanted was a bit of salt beef and flour. You had the rest: the cabbage, potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets, all that. Some [people] we used to grow onions too. Strong but good. Everyone seemed to be happy. Used to live well, never had much money. If you had a couple of hundred (dollars) in the fall, you was half a millionaire or you think you was. Used to get a lot of fish but the merchants usen't pay them very much for the fish, three or four dollars a quintal. Today if they got the fish they used to then, they would make a fortune. Some years they only broke even. Had to get a berth, trap boat, rubber boots, or clothes, whatever they wanted. The fella they went with had to bring all the grub and they had to pay so much for that. Sometimes when they came home in the fall, they wouldn't have a thing coming to them. Sometimes \$200 or \$300, that's the most. Ann Grace [would get] between \$50 - \$70 but had to cut throats too. Yes, they worked hard. Make the fish besides the cooking, spread it on the bawn. Sometimes, if they

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<sup>26</sup> Browne, W.J. "In Praise of Our Land," Section IV, "The Old District of Harbour Main," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 34:4 (April 1935), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Ewart Young, *Album of Avalon* (n.p.: *Guardia*, 1952).

were short-handed, they would have to go haul the traps out in the boats. Didn't believe it was unlucky to have a woman in the boat. No, they didn't care. If a woman got in the boat now we're finished. Get out now if the priest comes handy. Just a saying. People take it to heart. After a while all that wore out. Didn't come to them anymore. Had to blame it on something if they didn't get [fish].

[The men] made more money in the States but came home to go on the Labrador. Sometimes came home and went in the woods in winter<sup>28</sup>. Two hundred dollars or three hundred dollars in their pockets. Come home, buy a horse and a rig-out to go logging in the country, logging at Poole's Gully, twenty-five camps. Your father (Jim Doyle) had one. We had one.

Billy Whelan, Jack Whelan on the north side, Sam Walsh by side of pond. Mick Ryan in on the old road, Tom Hunt, Mose (Moses) Cole down the harbour, Jim Griffin, Jack McGrath in around the road, just like a little city--lantern lights--all winter. Be in all week. Leave Monday morning (with) grub, hay, oats. Anyone cutting logs - get up hour before daylight, feed horse, get ready, go up cut logs, haul 'em down. Some haul to Brigus Junction, more to Mahers -all the week. Sometimes fella driving horse would come home twice a week with load of firewood, longers, and stakes to do the fences. Sold logs to the sawmills for a sack of flour, oats for the horse. Start in December before Christmas if there was ice in the pond.

Warm - plenty of bed clothes. Water in the kettle (would be) frozen, wood on the floor (would be) frozen. So much [wood] made up for shavings laid on the stove - lit fire in the morning. Sometimes you come home in the evening soaking wet, take off clothes, hang it up on the big old Waterloo stove. Big heat. Cook the big meal: potatoes, meat, cabbage. Cut up wood for the night. Ten or half past ten, go to bed. Bad (weather) day. Didn't go in the woods. After you cooked the meal, you went visiting the camps, singing songs, talking about everything. Labrador. Real hang up.

Gathering places: (Colliers) Cross, Ghaney's Bridge, over on top of Lewis' Hill (in Conception Harbour) -- the Long Marsh, Conception Harbour Cross, down to the head in Conception Harbour, Bacon Cove wharf, Silly Bridge down by the Fire Hall (on the old Road in Colliers) -- Silly Bridge. So many got thrown off that little bridge--horse and dray, little rail, two by four rail on both sides. Get there in the night, carryin' on,

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<sup>28</sup> Early on in my research into the history of Colliers, I was told that Riverhead, where our land was purchased in 1876, was considered the woods as everyone moved away from the sea in the wintertime to clear land for the hay and vegetable gardens. They eventually built houses on the cleared land and lived there permanently. See also Philip E. L. Smith, "In Winter Quarters," *Newfoundland Studies* 3 (1987).



have a dance there, have a mouth organ. Any fella had an accordion would bring it in. Dancing, rumpussing, next thing, heard water. Some fella in the water. Mother mad, but you wouldn't mind it. Same thing the next night. The old wooden bridge at Ghaney's – dancing (with people from) Marysvale, Avondale, Colliers, Conception Harbour. This way, t'was us crowd. We'd go to Bacon Cove, the head, Avondale then. The crowd would come here. (It would be) Blocked from there (Hearn's Garden) to Bill Ghaney's gate. Some crowd. That would go all year. There would be more there in the winter throwing snowballs, playing. Rachel Skanes got dressed up in her dead brother's clothes, got on a date with Rae Burke and walked her down to Burke's Cove for badness, playing a game.<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen from this overview, most of the men spent the winters together in the woods. Unlike the Labrador fishery, this was a totally male experience. Some of the gathering places mentioned by Pad were daytime gathering places for men only, such as the "cross" or crossroads. The women were allowed to go to the bridge dances.

Public gathering places for work and leisure, particularly during the daytime, were predominantly, if not completely, male environments. Captain Matt Whelan remembers Morrissey's blacksmith shop as a little community in its own. Fourteen or fifteen horses. [The men would] be all in ...talking, telling stories, waiting to get the horses shoed. We were little boys listening to them.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the wood camps and blacksmith shop, the post office was a gathering place for both men and women. George Cole recounted the following history of the post office in Colliers.

Post office here before my mother was born. Uncle Johnny Cole--father's uncle, had the post office. She (my mother) came over here working, giving out the mail when she was 15, until she was 18. Then she married my father. Sister Bride is 89. Nineteen when Bride was born. Mother born

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<sup>29</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8686.

<sup>30</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

in 1878. (Uncle had post office before that.) Johnny had post office 120 years ago. Ninety-nine when he died.

First post office here. Nora Hedderson had one also. After my mother got sick it went in to Chris[tine] Whelan's [on Colliers Ridge] about 1933. When it left Nora Hedderson's that one [in the Harbour] went to Bride Conway's. When Bride Conway lost it, it went to Anna Conway. [There is] only one office [here now].

Mail came by mailman. Mailman come here in the morning and pick up the mail and go to Avondale to the train. Noon time or whatever time train got in he took it here. After that there was a mailman in Avondale. He'd come over here. Old Herbert Doyle. Billy--old truck when he get broke down he'd blow the horn to get some help to get her to go. (Bridget Cole: "Old Model T, one of the first trucks.") After that Mr. Doyle had a horse. He used to deliver the mail. An old woman had it before. She used to deliver the mail. Mother Costello - Mary - Mae drove the horse herself. Then Herbert Doyle from up on the Station Road. Then no mailmen - a truck went to St. John's.<sup>31</sup>

## Songs

The songs of Jim Doyle Sr., and other old people of Colliers are still being sung by Fred McGrath, and they give a reflection of the life of Colliers in Jim's and Kate Foley's times. He sings songs of sailors and sailing disasters, of drinking and courting and heartache, and of Ireland, the country of origin for most of the families of Colliers. There is humour and pathos in his songs. He sits on the chair in his kitchen or ours and has a drink or two to kill the cough, then closes his eyes and sings while moving his head back and forth to keep time, and taps his fingers or his foot. On the tape you can hear the wood fire crackle, the rum being poured, and the familiar voices and know that you are at

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<sup>31</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700, C8689. Bride (Cole) Whelan confirmed that Johnny Cole had a post office.



a family gathering that has changed in Fred's and Jim's lifetime but still somehow remains the same because the children are still gathering close to listen.

Jim Doyle Sr.'s house (Figure 5), the oldest one in Colliers, was a frequent gathering place for songs. The kitchen was the common gathering area, for like the lumber camps and fishing rooms, bedroom areas were only used for sleeping. A house from Labrador, located at Tickeraluck Island, is shown in Figure 6.

Jim and Fred said they would be lying in their beds and listening to their fathers and the men who came to drink the shine sing, and they picked up the songs. As Fred said, "I learned (songs) before I learned me prayers." All Fred's family could sing, and his brother Frank knew twice as many songs, having picked up some in Argentina at the American naval base.<sup>32</sup>

### **Religious and Educational History**

Although no history of Colliers has been written, much of its religious and educational history is contained in *Our People.. Our Church: Sts. Peter and Paul Parish Harbour Main, Newfoundland 1857-1982*.<sup>33</sup> Colliers was served by the clergy of Harbour Grace until the Brigus Parish was established in 1833. The church at Harbour Main was erected in 1857 to serve from Turk's Gut (Marysvale) to the south side of Holyrood. Despite the establishment of churches and eventually parishes at Salmon Cove (Avondale), Cat's Cove (Conception Harbour) and Holyrood, the large area of the

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<sup>32</sup> Clara J. Murphy, "Fred McGrath and the Songs of the Old Folks of Colliers," (1980), MUNFLA, ms., 81-166.

<sup>33</sup> *Our People.. Our Church: Sts. Peter and Paul Parish Harbour Main, Newfoundland 1857-1982* (Harbour Main, NF: published privately, 1983).

traditional parish of Harbour Main was administered from Harbour Main between 1868 and 1906.

Colliers people traditionally attended mass at Harbour Main and Conception Harbour, and even after the cemetery was opened in Conception Harbour, some Colliers people insisted on being buried in Harbour Main.<sup>34</sup> At least one Harbour Main priest, Father P.W. Browne, served as chaplain on the Labrador. His book *Where The Fishers Go* contains information gathered while he lived at Harbour Main and served as chaplain on the Labrador.<sup>35</sup>

Significant political conflicts within the community have been few, although people from Colliers were involved in the famous political march during the election of 1861:

The whole situation appears to have grown out of the understanding in the areas of Cat's Cove, Colliers, and Bacon Cove that Father Kyrán Walsh and his political henchman, Charles Furey, had been involved in manipulating the relief funds granted to the district to the detriment of these three communities which did not get their proportion of the relief funds. Moreover, the winter before the election the yards of Thomas St. John's brig had been cut while she wintered at Furey's wharf.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8702.

<sup>35</sup> Byrne, *Our People, Our Church*, p. 47. Father Browne was a Carbonear man, ordained there December 29, 1887. He was later a professor of History at the University of Ottawa from 1911 to 1914. He also taught at the Catholic University of America, where he died in 1932.

<sup>36</sup> "The Newfoundlander," St. John's, 1864, published in Cyril J. Byrne, "The Church in the History of the Parish of Harbour Main" in *Our People. Our Church*, p. 46. Only one of my informants mentioned this incident.

The march resulted in the death of a Harbour Main man, the closure of the church in Cat's Cove (Conception Harbour) for one year, and strained relationships between people and communities at the head of the bay lasting up until the present time.

### **Theoretical Approaches**

The annual trip from Newfoundland to the Labrador embodies many elements that contemporary geographers would regard as typical of migration, a process they define broadly as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence that can be voluntary or involuntary, over a short distance or a long distance.<sup>37</sup> Migration theory was summarized by Ravenstein in 1885 and reaffirmed in 1889. Few additional generalizations have been advanced since. Ravenstein found that generally people proceed only a short distance when migrating, and that the move is done in stages, in streams (and consequently counterstreams), mostly by rural people in response to technological or economic demands. Ravenstein also noted the significant role played by women in short distance moves.<sup>38</sup>

Essentially, economy and technology are the dominant factors in migration, which then follows certain patterns for the distance and the type of people moving. From the economic perspective, theorists hold that a basic requirement for any industry, be it agriculture, mining, fishing, or factory is to have a reserve army of skilled workers. This army has to be recruited, transported, worked, paid, and returned or dispersed when the

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<sup>37</sup> Everett S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration," *Population Geography: A Reader* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> For an overview, see Lee, pp. 288-89.



job is done. Seldom in the history of labour has the army been given preferential treatment.<sup>39</sup> Good examples of studies focusing on the treatment of migrant workers are two works by Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*<sup>40</sup> and its companion study, *Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in California*.<sup>41</sup> McWilliams, a historian and activist for Mexican-American rights, traces the history of California's first industry – agriculture – and its workers from 1870 to 1939. She states: "It is in many respects a melodramatic history of theft, fraud, violence and exploitation."<sup>42</sup>

According to McWilliams, there are two requisites for seasonal labourers: first, they must have the ability to move about quickly without incurring much transportation expense, and second, they must have the ability to hibernate, that is, to disappear when the crops are harvested until their services are again required.<sup>43</sup> These characteristics demonstrate why healthy, young, unattached males are the "aristocrats"<sup>44</sup> of agribusiness. White labourers with families were liabilities, because they could not move about as

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<sup>39</sup> Exceptions are professional and white collar workers. However, the migration of the elite is more of a circulation than a migration. See F. Musgrove, *The Migratory Elite* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1963). The recessions of 1982-84 and 1989 to the present with their subsequent lay-offs of surplus management workers, demonstrate that no class of worker is safe from forced migration.

<sup>40</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Brown, Little & Co., 1939).

<sup>41</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in California* (Boston: Brown, Little & Co., 1942).

<sup>42</sup> McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> The term "aristocrats" comes from Moore, *The Slaves We Rent* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 42. See also McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, p. 131.



cheaply as the “aristocrats” and hibernating with a family during slack times was no easy task. The Newfoundland migration tends to depart from this pattern, in certain respects. Although the first Newfoundland migrants were “aristocrats”, unattached men who were brought to the island to fish in the summertime, after 1809, merchants hired Newfoundland fishermen and their families to fish for them on the Labrador.<sup>45</sup> Daughters of these migrant fishermen married “livyers” (settlers) and increased the population of Labrador. Newfoundlanders later went back independently each summer to fish on their own, a process referred to as institutional migration.<sup>46</sup> Also, the institutional migrants of Newfoundland were unlike the perpetual migrants of America for one main reason: Newfoundland migrants moved as a part of living, not as a means of living. By this I mean that, after the initial stage of moving to Labrador, the Newfoundlanders had a definite idea of when and where they were going and after the season they would return home.

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<sup>45</sup> Information on the Labrador comes from class notes for Labrador Society and Culture (Anthropology 2220), November 29, 1984. See also Gerald M. Sider, “Christmas Mumming and the New Year in Outport Newfoundland,” *Past and Present* 71, 1976, pp. 102-125, for a description of the three stages of fishing. Additional sources include, Grant C. Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland*, The Carleton Library, no. 99 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 179-81; Gerald Britain, “Migration, Ecology and Choice: Social Process on a Newfoundland Island,” Unpublished Ms., Centre for Newfoundland Studies, 1972; and John J. Mannion, ed., *Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography*, Social and Economic Papers, No. 8 (St. John’s: Memorial University, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> Institutional migration is migration that supports traditional socioeconomic relationships, as opposed to transformational migration, which causes profound changes in the economy and social structure of a community [Stanley H. Brandes, *Migration, Kinship, and Community: Traditions and Transition in a Spanish Village* (New York: Academic, 1975), p. 14-15]. An example of the former is the traditional inheritance patterns for fishing berths or farms; examples of the latter would be slavery, urbanization, or resettlement.

Technological influences on migration include such factors as the restructuring of resource industries or the overuse of the resources themselves. Paul Thompson, in *Living the Fishing*, demonstrates how the development of the beam trawl and its subsequent adaptation to steam trawlers changed the nature of the English fishing industry, resulting not only in a dependence on shore capital to produce vessels, but also in the ability to travel to foreign fishing grounds.<sup>47</sup> Fishermen with advanced technological equipment also deplete the supply and must therefore wander far from traditional grounds.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, farmers are forced off their land to make way for agribusiness, and home industries are replaced by factories forcing rural people to migrate to urban centers for employment or to follow the harvest.

Again, the situation in Newfoundland differs in that the pattern of fishing on the Labrador in summer was identical to what the Newfoundlanders who remained at home would experience. Also, when industrialization hit the Newfoundland fishery, the advances within the Labrador fishery were identical to those in Newfoundland. Indeed, the Labrador fishery as prosecuted by the Newfoundlanders has been aptly called an inshore fishery at a distance.

In attempting to approach the Labrador fishery from a folkloristic point of view, one should bear in mind that the majority of the literature on migration has been written from the point of view of officials: historians, economists, cultural geographers, social

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<sup>47</sup> Thompson, et al., pp. 10-18.

<sup>48</sup> For examples, see Thompson, et al.; William W. Warner, *Distant Water: The Fate of the North Atlantic Fishermen*, (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1984) and Joseph Zulaika, *Terra Nova: The Ethos and Luck of Deep Sea Fishermen* (St. John's: Memorial University, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1981).



workers, union organizers, or various government officers. Migration is usually considered by them in relation to abstract pushes and pulls operating in a geographic space. While they do make an attempt to show the impact of migration on the migrants, their insightful observations and excerpts from conversations/interviews with migrants show a concern for socioeconomic issues: the substandard means of recruitment, transportation, working conditions, living arrangements, health and educational facilities, wages, etc. By contrast, a strikingly different emphasis surfaced in a preliminary examination of twenty-eight manuscripts relating to the Labrador in MUNFLA, which I conducted at the outset of my research. Whereas the etic perspective stresses the work rounds and the appalling conditions under which the Labrador fishermen lived and worked, the fishermen themselves recount these as normal aspects of a fisherman's life and place more emphasis on the interpersonal aspects. The contrast between the oral and the official sources reveals a wide gulf between the etic and emic views of the Labrador fishery and suggests a need for an eclectic approach to the study of migrants.

From the insider's point of view, going on the Labrador is, in some respects, analogous to moving the family to the summer cabin by the lake, although there are, of course, important differences in the two activities. Rosenow and Pulsipher, in *Tourism: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, list the reasons people give for taking vacation trips, few of which correspond to the factors that sent people to the Labrador:

getting away from job pressures, spending time with the *children*,  
providing an opportunity for the *family* to be together, expanding *family*

education, reliving American history, and enjoying other areas of the country (emphasis mine)<sup>49</sup>

Their assessment of the benefits of travel, however, does apply to the Labrador experience. They state, for example, that “one of the greatest values of travel is self renewal” and that travel

provides educational experiences which can be gained in no other way. It can strengthen *marital and family* ties by providing important shared experiences which today’s increasingly fragmented *families* often lack. And a change in scene can often improve our mental and emotional well being (emphasis mine).<sup>50</sup>

If one substitutes the word “group” (*i.e.*, the Labrador fishermen) for the underlined words in the preceding quotations and by keeping the quotations in mind while reading the accounts from members of the group, the parallels will become clear.

The annual migration, however, of thousands of Newfoundlanders, which went on until the mid-twentieth century, was more than a working summer vacation. Rather, it was, in Van Gennep’s term, a rite of passage.<sup>51</sup> This is perhaps not surprising given that migration appears to be a central part of various important stages of the life cycle: beginning or cessation of education, entrance into or retirement from the labour force, marriage or dissolution of marriage, either through divorce or the death of a spouse. As J. Wolpert states:

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<sup>49</sup> John E. Rosenow and Gerreld L. Pulsipher, *Tourism: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Lincoln, NE: Century Three, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1908; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).



The cycle of life almost inevitably gives rise to distinct movement behaviour from birth, education and search for a niche involving prime or replacement movements.<sup>52</sup>

In their summer travels, a heterogeneous group of Newfoundland fishermen would spend four months on the Labrador, passing through stages of separation, transition, and incorporation or reincorporation,<sup>53</sup> to emerge as Labrador fishermen, a ritual repeated seventy-seven times by one informant.

The structural elements which I discerned in the narratives of Labrador fisher people can be ordered as follows: first, "going in collar," that is, the preparations for the trip; second, "on the passage," the trip down; third, the arrival at the room or berth and consequent setting activities; fourth, the daily work rounds; fifth, "harbour days," which are days of enforced idleness caused by bad weather or the more acceptable slack times of Sundays and the days of waiting for the schooner in the Fall; and sixth, the trip home. The categories can be seen as subsets of Van Gennep's stages in the following manner:

Separation	Going in collar On the passage Arrival at the station
Transition	The work rounds Harbour days
Reincorporation	The trip home

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<sup>52</sup> J. Wolpert, "Behavioural Aspects of the Decision to Migrate," *Population Geography*, p. 303.

<sup>53</sup> Van Gennep, pp. 10-14.

Van Gennep states that the second stage, transition, is characterized by a quality of "liminality," that is, a temporary displacement from everyday community norms.<sup>54</sup> As the subsequent chapters will reveal, the Labrador did constitute a "liminal" experience for the people of Colliers: the community's sense of group was reshaped as people came together with residents of other settlements and "bays" to form temporary group affiliations at the fishing stations. Within these groups religious differences were put aside, some native practices were adopted to make a difficult environment more bearable, and in some cases, even basic social relationships were altered when people adopted new partners during their time on the Labrador.

To reconstruct and describe the important features of this rite of passage from the point of view of my informants, I have relied heavily on oral historical approaches, using autobiographies, biographies, and interviews with cultural insiders. Also considered were the narratives, music, songs, sayings, beliefs and customs they shared with each other whenever they had the opportunity. In my opinion, much can be learned about migratory workers by examining the processes of socialization into the occupation and the genres used to distinguish themselves from their bosses.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Van Gennep, p. 11; see also, Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," *The Forest of Symbols*, ed. Victor Turner (New York: Basic, 1964) and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) pp. 95-96.

<sup>55</sup> For an excellent example of socialization into work, see O. Lofgren, "The Making of a Fisherman: The Social Context of Socialization in a Swedish Fishing Community," *The Fishing Culture of the World: Studies in Ethnology, Cultural Ecology and Folklore*, 2 vols, ed. Bela Gunda, (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1984), pp. 281-97.

Essentiality, the thesis hopes to document the “folk history” of one community’s involvement in the Labrador fishery. According to Dorson, folk history is oral traditional history which seeks out the topics and themes which the people wish to talk about, the personal and immediate history with which they are concerned.<sup>56</sup> A key aspect of oral folk history is that more than one “folk” exists and each folk group regards events and personalities of the past through its own particular lens.<sup>57</sup> Scholarly disciplines have endlessly debated the trustworthiness of folk history. However, folk memory is reliable, particularity when the following conditions have been met:

- continuity of residence in the area of the tradition
- reinforcement of the traditions with reference to surrounding landmarks
- the training, formal or informal, of oral chroniclers within the society.

What the folk historian wishes to record is not just the plain unvarnished fact but all the motions, biases, and reactions aroused by the supposed fact, for in them lay the historical perspectives.<sup>58</sup>

A good example of this approach is John W. Blassingame’s *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. He uses autobiographies of slaves as his prime source and provides a critical essay on all his sources. His chapter on culture

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Dorson, “The Oral Historian and the Folklorist,” quoted by Larry Danielson in “The Folklorist, the Oral Historian, and Local History,” in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1984) p. 179.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Dorson, “The Oral Historian and the Folklorist,” in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1984) p. 299.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



is an important one for folklorists, for it demonstrates the importance of expressive behaviours for coping with the harsh realities of plantation life. He writes:

However oppressive or dehumanizing the plantation was, struggle for survival was not severe enough to crush all of the slave's creative instincts. Among the elements of slave culture were: an emotional religion, folk songs and tales, dances, and superstitions. Much of the slave's culture, language, customs, beliefs, and ceremonies - set him apart from his master. His thoughts, values, ideals and behaviour were all greatly influenced by these processes. The more his cultural forms differed from those of his master and the more they were immune from the control of whites, the more the slaves gained in personal autonomy and positive self-concepts.<sup>59</sup>

My examination of similar sources, my oral interviews with former migratory fishermen of Newfoundland, and my brief sojourn into their experience show that they lived a rich cultural life despite the hardships of migrant life: hardships associated with travel, accommodations, working conditions, health, education, wages, power, and status.

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<sup>59</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 41- 42.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **FIELDWORK**

This chapter presents an account of my fieldwork experiences while collecting the life history narratives of men and women who had fished on the Labrador. My fieldwork consisted of three main parts: 1) archival preparation, 2) field trips on the Labrador, and 3) fieldwork in the communities of Colliers and Conception Harbour. To set the scene for the in-depth description of each component of the experience of going on the Labrador, my first field trip to the Labrador is given as a personal experience narrative. The various locations visited are shown on the map in Figure 1. The route followed started by Canadian National (CN) bus at St. John's (q.v., Figure 1, 21), then proceeded by boat from Lewisporte (q.v., Figure 1, 20), and continued as far north as Nain (q.v., Figure 1, 2).

#### **Origins of the Study**

While an undergraduate student in Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland, I wrote several term papers based on fieldwork in my home community of Colliers. Through that research, I became interested in the folk history of Colliers to the point where I decided to do a community study, and I was encouraged by the faculty to do this as a Master's thesis. Although I was living and working in St. John's as an undergraduate, I spent my free time at home observing the folklore of my family and interviewing some of the older people in Colliers.

Until I became interested in the Labrador fishery, I was planning a study similar to Linda Dégh's *Four Lives in the Tobacco Belt*,<sup>60</sup> but focusing on the history of Colliers. With Sean O'Sullivan's *Handbook of Irish Folklore*<sup>61</sup> as a guide, my other ambition was to collect everything from anyone who would tell me anything about Colliers. My professors quickly set me straight and told me to narrow my focus. Thus, the topic became the Labrador fishery.

The original concept for the thesis emerged from an undergraduate class in Folklore. The professor, Dr. Larry Small, spoke of an interview with a man who talked about the Labrador fishery in very glowing terms; it had been the best experience of his life and he wished he could go back and start it over. When Dr. Small later spoke to the man's wife, who was present during the interview, she said that it was the most horrible experience of her life and she never wanted to go back to it again. Dr. Small went on to say that the Labrador fishery was a topic needing study because it was a recent happening and fresh in the minds of the people, and the older people who remembered it were dying. I remember filing this away as a topic for a paper which might be done later.

As a graduate student, I worked part-time as an archival assistant at Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive. My task there was to survey the archive holdings pertaining to the Labrador fishery in preparation for Dr. Neil Rosenberg's "Oral History of the Labrador Fishery" course. While conducting this

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<sup>60</sup> Linda Dégh, *Four Lives in the Tobacco Belt*, Mercury Series, No. 13 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 1975).

<sup>61</sup> Sean O'Sullivan, *Handbook of Irish Folklore* (1942; rpt. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1963).



survey, I became interested in the material, reading it on my own time and using it as the basis of a paper. The natural culmination of this activity was my participation in the course.

Throughout my years as a full-time student in the Folklore Department, 1983-1985, all of the archival assistants at MUNFLA knew my area of interest and gave me references to any relevant manuscripts they encountered. Meanwhile, I left my position as archival assistant to work as assistant to Dr. Gerald Pocius indexing newspapers, where I discovered a wealth of material relating to the Labrador fishery for the years 1828 to 1928. I later used some of this material to compile a newspaper index of the Labrador Straits fishery.

It had never occurred to me to do fieldwork on the Labrador. My plan was to interview people who had gone on the Labrador and ask them about their experiences. My supervisor, Dr. Wilf Wareham, suggested that I retrace the route taken to the Labrador by the people from Colliers. Very quickly, I put together a proposal with the help of Philip Hiscock, who had done some survey work in Labrador. It was approved and funded by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and I set off for Labrador in the summer of 1984.

### **Fieldwork**

During the month of July 1984, I was able to participate in a shortened version of the annual migration. I went "in collar"<sup>62</sup> with ISER funding. Preparations were difficult

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<sup>62</sup> "Going in collar" is the expression Newfoundlanders use to refer to the process of signing on and making preparations for the trip to Labrador.

to undertake. Unlike the fishermen or female cooks, I did not have a clear idea of where I would be spending my season, but my experience in going on the Labrador followed the same pattern as my informants. Arrangements were made for a boarding house in Cartwright with the possibility of trips to Splitting Knife, Cut Throat, and Smokey where my informants had fished. The trip was preceded by an interview with my father in April, 1984, and the reading of archival accounts. My head was filled with stories of storms, wrecks, rape, medical emergencies, unprofitable trips, and drownings. Of these, the last two overwhelmed me with the implications of what I was undertaking. Not only did I have to worry about the effect the type and amount of baggage I took could have among the people I hoped to interview, but I also had to give serious consideration to the fate of my eleven-year-old son and my twelve-year-old daughter should I not return. A folk belief imparted to me at age eleven predicted that I would die by drowning because my eyebrows met in the middle. At the time, a fate worse than death was the fear of failing as a researcher by not learning anything about the past or present Labrador fishery on this trip. This was reinforced by one of the crew members who upon hearing I was travelling alone said: "You'll be bored to death. No one will talk to you."<sup>63</sup> Added to these worries were the fears of being a poor sailor. Even though I had outgrown motion sickness suffered in cars and boats as a child, an attack of Meniere's Disease in 1981 has left me subject to temporary losses of balance after being in something that is in motion (cars, elevators, boats). I had also been conditioned as a child not to speak to strangers and, as

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<sup>63</sup> Field notebook 1, July 6, 1984.

an adult, had been told that my “friendly face and warm smile could get me more than I bargained for.”

At this point my built in fatalism - that I could only go (die) when my time came - kicked in. It was perhaps the loneliest time of my life. I was going too late in the season and, therefore, no fishermen were on hand for interviews. Indeed the timing was completely wrong for interviewing working fishermen. Interviews had to be caught on the run because people came on board, disappeared into cabins and/or social groups, appeared briefly when we dropped anchor for thirty minutes or so, and disappeared again. The tourists and a medical student on the way to do frontier medicine became my companions, and I essentially became one of a class apart from the people I wished to interview. I quickly realized that knocking on cabin doors would not be welcomed and, instead, I used the opportunities of meal times and the occasional moments when a fisherman or a fisherman’s family would join our social group to explain to them what I was doing. I also spent a lot of time on the deck observing the passengers and crew at places of embarkation and/or debarkation. This was especially intriguing when we stopped just off the land, as in the old days.

My journey began on July 5, 1984 when I took a Canadian National (CN) bus front St. John’s (q.v., Figure 1, 21) to Lewisporte (q.v., Figure 1, 20) and discovered my boat was not leaving until the next morning. From July 6 to July 11, I journeyed aboard the *Taverner*, to Goose Bay (q.v. Figure 1 .10) .This trip takes in approximately thirty-three stops depending upon the needs of the Labradorians and/or Newfoundland fishing families. I left Goose Bay on the *Bonavista*, another CN boat, on July 12 to travel



roundtrip to Nain in order to see where the Colliers people had fished (Figures 1 and 3) and also where the floater fishermen had gone. The floater fishermen sometimes went as far north as Cape Chidley (q.v., Figure 1, 1), but the coastal boats ended their trips in Nain, ice and weather permitting. The stationers rarely went farther north than the Cut Throat/Smokey area.

The field trip to Labrador was supposed to be in the company of my father, one of the last of the Labrador fishermen from Colliers. Unfortunately, he didn't think that I was serious when I asked him to come along with me and I eventually made the trip alone.

I think that my experience was very similar to those I had read about in archival accounts. Early in the voyage, I recall being in the bow of the ship, heading into the evening, feeling very much on my own and realizing that my head was full of stories of the Labrador that I'd heard at home during fieldwork and read in the archival accounts. I was excited and frightened at the same time, probably feeling the same way that other people felt when they went on the Labrador for the first time.

I took what is called "the slow boat" from Lewisporte to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Once I became accustomed to the boat and realized that I wasn't going to get sea sick, I offered the second berth in my cabin to a Labrador woman and her child. The woman, whose husband was from Carbonear, Newfoundland, was returning from her mother's funeral in Red Bay to her husband's fishing place in Square Islands.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Although he owned a long liner, he found it more economical to fish from the shore in a small boat. Field notebook 1, July 8, 1984.

From Happy Valley, I did not have a single room. This worked to my advantage and allowed me to collect a few more stories of where people came from in Newfoundland, where they were going to on the Labrador, and why they were on this trip.

When I boarded the coastal boat, *Taverner*, in Lewisporte, I thought that I could just go door to door with tape recorder and collect marvellous interviews. Of course, this is not the way things usually work out. Some passengers suffered from motion sickness and didn't want to talk to anyone for the entire trip. Other passengers were tourists who could offer little information. It was late in the season and all the fishermen were already on the Labrador. Some passengers were wives joining their husbands, but, for the most part, the passengers were people returning home or tourists visiting Labrador for the first time.

The crew was very uncooperative at first, which I put down to the fact that they were busy getting under way. Some crew members said they would talk to me later, others said they wouldn't. I was teased by the crew, especially the steward, Jerry, about not getting interviews. On the return trip a crew member explained to me that the crew members on the two *Taverner* trips thought that I was a spy for CN<sup>65</sup> and they did not want to talk to me for fear of losing their jobs.

I did eventually conduct two interviews with crew members, based upon a questionnaire (Appendix A) devised by a fellow student, Jill Thompson, who not only

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<sup>65</sup> Marine Atlantic Ltd.'s former parent company, Canadian National Marine.

took the oral history course on the Labrador fishery with me but had also taken a trip on a Labrador coastal boat.<sup>66</sup>

Other elements of the trip did not come off quite as expected. I had made arrangements to travel to the Labrador Straits area to go out on a long liner. Unfamiliar with travel on the Labrador, I soon discovered that it would be impossible to visit both the Smokey/Cut Throat area and the Labrador Straits area without flying from Happy Valley to Blanc Sablon.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, my budget would not permit this, though there was a measure of relief in avoiding the Straits, as it was reportedly the worst year there for black flies and mosquitoes in forty years.<sup>68</sup>

On arriving in Cartwright, I got off the boat while it sailed on a side trip to Paradise. When I met the woman with whom I was supposed to stay, she expressed reluctance to host me; in the summertime, she wanted to be out fishing and did not want to look after anyone. I explained that, though I was from the university, I had grown up in Colliers without plumbing and electricity for part of my life, and with a wood stove still in the kitchen, so I was capable of fending for myself in her home. I added that if necessary I could probably stay with friends in Rigolet.

She went on to say that there would hardly be anyone in Cartwright for me to interview but that I could hitch a ride to Smokey, Cut Throat, and Splitting Knife, areas

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<sup>66</sup> Jill Thompson, "The Role of the Coastal Boat in the Labrador Fishery," MUNFLA, ms., 84-186.

<sup>67</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>68</sup> The issue of insects and the problems they pose for people working on the Labrador is described in Chapter 4.



on the coast where the Colliers people had fished.<sup>69</sup> We tried to make phone calls to Rigolet to find a boarding house there for me. However, everyone was out at the summer stations.

The woman and I decided to leave open the choice of staying in Cartwright or Rigolet. "If I came, I came. If not, it was fine." As it turned out, most of the fisherpeople said it was better to do interviews in the wintertime, because in the summer people were too busy making a living. Wintertime was the time for talk.

### **The Northern Run**

I continued on to Happy Valley-Goose Bay after the *Taverner* returned from Paradise. On the way, we stopped at Rigolet and I ran into one of my university friends, Jean, a schoolteacher from Newfoundland. She said she would mention to another university friend and teacher, Marie, that I was on the coast and have her keep an eye out for me. I stayed overnight in Happy Valley and was lucky enough to cut expenses by sharing a hotel suite with two tourists from Ontario. The next morning, I went down to join the *Bonavista*, a larger vessel with an atmosphere different from that of the *Taverner* but similar to the coastal boats on which the Colliers people had travelled.

A friend who had come down to see me off was telling me a story of a mutual acquaintance from a coastal community that I would be visiting who had killed his parents and then himself. When he moved away from me for a moment to recover from this emotional disclosure, one of a group of crew members who had been watching us and obviously talking about us, came over. After learning that I was travelling alone, he

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<sup>69</sup> See Figure 1, 11 and Figure 3.

said, "This boat is nicknamed the Love Boat and I can show you why." I was still in shock from hearing of the tragedy and I think there must have been something in the look I gave him that told him to back away. This advance, following so closely upon terrible news, really upset and frightened me. Many a Newfoundland girl had come home pregnant from the Labrador and I felt that I was confronted with the possibility of being forcibly seduced by this ugly crew member.

However, this part of the trip was not as lonely or as frightening as it first appeared. A former St. John's taxi driver named Tom, with whom I had been well acquainted while I worked as a group home coordinator, was a crew member on this trip. Several people from the university, including Anne Hart - the mother of one of my classmates - and Nancy Grenville from the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, were on this trip and provided a much-needed link with my life back home.

Fieldworkers situated alone often feel private panic at being stranded in the oceanic vastness of a foreign people. One's concept of self disintegrates because the accustomed responses have disappeared; one seeks restoration through letters from home, addressed to the remembered personality. There are loneliness, uprooting, fears, true and marked physical hardships, diseases, lack of diversions to relieve tensions-all of these nurture melancholies and spiritual fatigue.<sup>70</sup>

I had already experienced these feelings and continued to do so while travelling on the *Bonavista*. The feelings intensified as the coastal boat moved farther north beyond the traditional fishing areas of the people of Colliers. The *Bonavista* was older and dirtier

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<sup>70</sup> Ruth Landes, "A Woman Anthropologist in Brazil," in *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences*, ed. Peggy Golde (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), 123.



than the *Taverner*, but there were compensations beside the presence of three familiar faces.

I shared a four-berth cabin with two Newfoundland women going to Indian Harbour and a Labradorian returning to Hopedale from England for the summer. Needless to say, as we approached Smokey, I was very excited and wished that I could go out to Cut Throat Island where my father had been fishing. I was speaking these thoughts out loud to my cabin mate that morning when a fisherman who was unloading to go to Cut Throat said "It's too bad. The weather's not so good this morning or you could go with me. I have to drop off some supplies and come back for the rest." I very quickly said that I had rain gear. He dubiously answered, "If you dress warm." I ran down to my cabin, piled on every bit of clothes that I had, including my rain gear, and ran back up to the deck. By this point, he had loaded his small boat with half of the supplies he needed for his summer's fishing at Splitting Knife and was ready to go. For a moment, it looked as if he had forgotten about me. Then he turned, saw me, and signalled, "Do you want to go?" I nodded and ran down the steps and hopped into his boat to the total amazement of some of the crew and passengers who knew I was scheduled to go to Nain and had not realized that I had made arrangements to go with the fisherman. It was very foggy and extremely cold. We were skirting the ice and traps, literally disappearing into the fog.

Fortunately, we reached Splitting Knife on Cut Throat Island with no problems. He said, "Hop out. We'll be here about ten minutes. Walk around a bit." Needless to say, there was no one up that early in the morning. I did not want to go too far and thus delay him. When he was ready to go, he asked, "Are you ready?" He then suggested that he



take a picture of me on the beach where, more than likely, my father and other family members had unloaded their summer supplies, so that I could bring it back as a souvenir to my father. He reached down and picked up a small beach rock and gave it to me for my father. We returned to the vessel. I was grinning from ear to ear even though I was frozen. I probably entered into the folklore of that voyage for some of my fellow travelers because of that little adventure so early on a cold, foggy morning.

When we arrived at Davis Inlet, there was at first the usual morning's peaceful quietness, and suddenly, there was a babble of noise as many Labradorians and Innu came aboard and excitedly talked to acquaintances among the passengers and crew. It seemed that the whole community came on board and stayed with us for the two-day trip to Nain and back (round trippers). The boat literally sank a foot in the water under the weight of the crowd aboard. Because of the number of people on the vessel, we very quickly ran into problems with blocked toilets and the odour in the accommodations area on the lower deck was soon unbearable. For a while, the salon, which had been the meeting area of the vessel, was closed, and thus the Innu were forced to congregate in the passageways of the lower deck unless they had cabins. The boat appeared to be very overcrowded, and the noise was constant day and night. The cabin next to ours was occupied by teenagers, who partied all night. I finally fell asleep after hearing, "There's only one "Candy" with the hole in the middle," for the hundredth time. The sixteen year old sister of my roommate had a black eye when she visited the next morning. My sunglasses and hair pick were stolen out of the cabin. As for my more pressing concerns, there was really no place to conduct interviews and it was too noisy.

I did as I had done on the first lap of the voyage. I talked informally to people and asked some basic questions. Are the Newfoundlanders still fishing here? Where are they fishing? Where had they fished? Did you get along with them in the past and now?

This stage of the trip proved true some stories I had heard about the crew's treatment of certain passengers, examples of which will be given in the next chapter. One evening, I went to supper early. I found myself standing with some Labradorians and looking in through the glass of a locked door at "the crowd from the university," who were having a private dinner. They must have started half an hour before the cafeteria officially opened. One of the women from Labrador passed the comment that, "Here we are again. The rich on the inside and the poor on the outside." She looked at me and smiled. She had included me as one of her group. I usually sat with the Labradorians and had often observed the reluctance with which the crew dealt with the Innu and Inuit, especially when they spoke in their own language. My supper companion said they often spoke Inuktitut to spite the crew members who did not like them.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike the lower deck accommodations, the upper class cabins had their own showers, and I must confess that I did take up my friends' offer to go up there and take a shower when it became impossible to do so downstairs. I once went up there just to get away from the noise and have a few moments to myself. Eventually, the crew re-opened the salon, which made the ship seem less crowded, and, as on the previous trip on the *Taverner*, I would go there to socialize with passengers. However, the men always seemed to be involved in a poker game and the younger people preferred to "hang out"

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<sup>71</sup> Field notebook 1, July 14, 1984.



down in the cabins. Most of my interactions were with a Newfoundland craftswoman, a Nova Scotian artist, and several Labrador women.

At one point, I overheard Tom - the crew member I knew - and Anne Hart having a conversation about a tent we had seen on an exposed headland. Tom said that it was crazy for people to be camping on this headland and certainly crazy for someone to be travelling alone, especially a "girl." Then he looked at me as if to say "You're crazy to be here on your own."

The pattern on this trip was similar to that of the one in southern Labrador. We would call into a community long enough to offload or take on cargo or passengers and we were quickly gone again. We were delayed in Nain all morning. As is the custom in Labrador, everyone came down to the wharf to see if they knew anyone on the boat and to break the monotony of living in an isolated community.

The pleasure of such occasions was sometimes hampered by danger, and on this particular morning the customary visit was nearly marred with tragedy. A young girl, about sixteen years old and obviously drunk, was sitting on one of the piles on the dock. Tom, who had come over to talk to me as I was leaning over the side, told me to move away as she was going to fall over the wharf. No sooner had we moved away than she did so. Crew members were not allowed to rescue her as they are not allowed to do anything on shore. None of the Inuit made a move to rescue her. Two local white men dived into the water and, using a rope provided by the crew, got her out, did mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and brought her around. It was an alarming experience and could have been tragic.



Tales of accidental drowning figure prominently in narratives of the Labrador, and the potential for such tragedy is always present. One evening when we were returning down the coast, we stopped engines to pick up a man who was returning from his summer station to his permanent winter community, and the couple who had brought him came on board with him to conduct a bit of business. When I looked down at their boat, I saw that it was being jostled by choppy waves and in it were two little boys, without life jackets and dressed totally in dark clothes. There was the one light from the boat shining down on them but everything else was pitch black. I feared that if I turned away, they would drown and no one would know that they were gone. One reason why I was quite overwhelmed by this experience was that my former cabin mates, two Newfoundland women on their way to Indian Harbour, had told me about two young boys from Harbour Grace who had drowned at Petty Harbour on the Labrador, and how their mother still returned in the summertime because, when she was in Labrador, she felt close to them.<sup>72</sup> Also, having two children of my own, I felt a sense of responsibility for these children. I felt that they would not drown as long as I watched them. If the boat overturned I would at least be able to call for help. Fortunately, nothing happened to them. Their parents returned to the boat and they left.

I attempted to interview one Labradorian who disliked Newfoundlanders, and who found Newfoundland women particularly annoying, because "they didn't have the courage to live on the Labrador year round." At this point, I mentioned that, based upon my research, this was not true. Newfoundland women as well as Newfoundland men

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<sup>72</sup> Field notebook 1, July 11, 1984.

married into the Labrador and settled there. That appeared to change her attitude somewhat and she agreed to an interview.<sup>73</sup>

At the instigation of a fellow traveler, we visited the wheelhouse, which was off-limits to passengers, and we were caught in the act by the Captain. I quickly explained to him that I was researching the traditional Newfoundland fishery at Cut Throat Island and wondered what the island looked like on a navigational chart. He invited me to return at a more opportune time to view maps of Cut Throat Island and Smokey and to see the islands as we approached them.

### **My Stay at Tickeraluck Point**

When we reached Rigolet, I had to connect with the boat coming from Goose Bay to return to Cartwright. It turned out that Jean's husband, Charlie, was there and introduced me to Marie's husband, Richard, who telephoned Marie to come down for a visit with me. When I told her what I was researching, she asked, "Why don't you stay here? My mother-in-law used to work for the Newfoundland fishermen." In my readings and interviews I had not found any references to Labrador women working for the Newfoundland fishermen. The Newfoundland fishermen had either brought down their wives or hired girls to cook on their schooners or one of the men had to double as a cook. I jumped at the opportunity, took all my things off the boat, and spent the night in Rigolet at her house. Next morning, Marie, her husband Richard, her mother and father-in-law, Susan and George, and her three children motor-boated fifteen miles to Tickeraluck

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<sup>73</sup> MUNFLA, 86-013, C8673.

Point, their summer salmon fishing station. The baby, who was less than a year old, travelled in a plastic fish box to protect her from the spray and from falling overboard.

When we arrived, I assumed the role of mother's helper, one of the positions filled by young girls going on the Labrador. Marie and Susan shared the cooking at the latter's house (Figure 6), which was a short distance from Marie's. The two women appeared to be territorial about the kitchen and cooking, so I did not help with either. However, I did help the young girls with cleaning the dishes and looking after the baby. I did not do any interviewing on my first night there because I was tired by the excitement and stress. I think that they were a bit surprised when I returned with Marie to her house. However, I was on a strange island and had not brought along a flashlight. One problem that I experienced during my three day stay on the island was that I was allergic to fish and the women were very concerned that I would "starve" on my suggested diet of potatoes, bread, and tea. They scrounged around to see what they could find for me and substituted eggs and canned corned beef for fish whenever it was served.

I went out to the salmon net once with Richard. There was only one salmon, a "peel."<sup>74</sup> While we were out on the water, we visited the residents on Tickeraluck Island. We spent one evening spreading capelin on the "bawn"<sup>75</sup> to dry for their winter food. This was my one and only experience with fish on the Labrador. Because the flies were so thick, it was just as well to close our eyes while laying out the capelin because we

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<sup>74</sup> Marie told me "peel" was the name given to a salmon weighing less than 5 pounds.

<sup>75</sup> In this case, "bawn" refers not to rocks that the fishermen put together for drying fish, but to the blackberry bushes which supposedly gave flavour to the capelin. The word comes from Gaelic and means "white," the colour the salt stained the rocks. The French term is "grave."



could not see anything anyway. The traditional way of dealing with flies on the Labrador was to endure them. Marie brought out “fly dope” which we quickly put on and did not wash off any more than we had to for the duration of our stay on the island. To get flies out of the house, people burnt blackberry bushes on the doorstep, which was amazingly effective. When we arrived, the house was covered inside and outside with flies. After the wind blew the smoke around the house, the flies disappeared.

The women were occupied mainly with cooking, washing clothes, and laying out the capelin. The year 1984 was not a good year for either salmon or cod. Because the Tickeraluck Point men were involved with the salmon rather than the cod fishery, there was none of the kind of work being done that had been performed by the traditional Newfoundland fishermen out on the coast.<sup>76</sup> Still, the day passed quickly. The women sewed grass; I took pictures and interviewed them about the process.<sup>77</sup>

As had been traditional in Newfoundland homes, people more or less went to bed with the sun and got up with the sun. We stayed up later than that. In the evening, we would go over to George’s and Susan’s cabin and have a talk. We boiled the kettle and made toast on the woodstove.

Marie, her baby Rochelle, and I returned by boat with Richard on his salmon run to Rigolet where we spent the night. Marie’s house did not have running water or sewer

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<sup>76</sup> 1984 commercial salmon fishing practice required the extra work of delivering the ice-packed salmon to Rigolet every few days. Fishermen who live farther out had their salmon picked up by collector boats from the fish plant in Rigolet. Sometimes the money paid to Richard for the salmon he brought to the fish plant was less than the cost of gas to deliver it.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 4 for a description.

so doing things like washing clothes was labour intensive. One had to carry and heat the water. It was the same with washing hair. One could do it on one's own, but it was easier as a two-person operation. We spent most of that night just getting washed up.

Marie, Rochelle and I went to the post office to make arrangements to fly in to Happy Valley-Goose Bay the next morning. Sometimes, Labrador Airway picked up the passengers early in the morning and took them to wherever the plane was going up the coast before going to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The pilots decided not to pick us up on the way because they had too many passengers; because there were no bathroom facilities on board, I was quite happy to be on the shorter trip.

The following day's trip by small plane from Rigolet to Happy Valley-Goose Bay was spectacular. We flew over Hamilton Inlet where the coastal boat had taken me the previous week. It was also a bit scary. I could look into the cockpit and see every move the pilots made. It sometimes seemed as if the engines had failed. The cargo, to my mind, was not strapped down very well, and the cabin was full of flies. When I got out of the plane, I looked as if somebody had cut my throat; the flies had come across my neck in one straight line and it was full of blood. By then, I was used to the flies and had not paid attention to the bites, but Marie got quite a fright and screamed when she first saw my throat.

We arrived in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and were met by Marie's friends. The Skoglunds, at whose house I was to stay, weren't around, so the former took me to their house until I could make arrangements to go to the Skoglunds' house. The man who was supposed to stay there with me decided to leave Labrador so I ended up having the house

to myself for a week. This was a Saturday night, and I decided to take Sunday off to go to church, do my laundry, call home, and generally relax. It turned out that I had to take more than Sunday off, as I had a case of what is called locally “coastal stomach” (diarrhoea). While recuperating, I visited the office of *Them Days, Stories of Early Labrador*, a quarterly magazine which deals with the oral history of Labradorians. Although they had an archive, it wasn’t open to the public at the time. Doris Saunders, the editor, said that much of what was in the archive was published in the magazine, so I bought a complete set of *Them Days*.

While still confined to the house, I read and indexed the magazines for references to Newfoundlanders, fishing, and interchanges between the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I also visited the Labrador Institute for Northern Studies, where I received a copy of *Bounty of the Barren Coast*, and spent some time socializing with a friend from the *Bonavista*. To round out my visit to modern Labrador, I visited the Royal Air Force club called “The Bulldog.”

### **The Trip Home**

The return trip from Happy Valley to Lewisporte was by the *Taverner*, but with a different crew. There was a mix-up with my accommodations, and I ended up getting a nicer cabin than I was able to keep all the way back, and this time did not share it with anyone. Again, the procedure on this trip was similar to the first two legs of the voyage. I spent most of my waking time on deck talking to crew members and fellow passengers, asking where Newfoundlanders had fished, where they were still fishing, and if there were conflicts between them. What is significant about this trip is that it was finally



revealed to me that I was considered a spy by most of the crew. This information had been transmitted by the first crew of the *Taverner* to its second crew, and that was why some of those on this trip would not talk to me. I was told that some crew members had been avoiding me on the first trip also. The shock of being told the crew considered me a spy made me so angry that I withdrew from all social activity for much of the day. When I emerged from my cabin to go ashore in Harbour Deep I ignored the crew's attempt to banter with me.

This experience had its frightening side, as well. One of the crew members who thought I was a spy had been telling me scary stories about fishermen threatening to throw interfering officials overboard. In this way, I was being threatened. At the same time, one of the crew members had been sent to check out "what I was up to." In the end, we became good friends and spent a fair bit of the voyage involved in a ship-board romance. So, I guess the betrayal was double for that.

All's well that ends well. I was invited up to the wheelhouse by the first mate who observed that I'd spent enough time freezing in the bow and decided I deserved a better view. When I asked if they were afraid I would report this breach of the regulations, a discussion was held on the unfair practice of using spotters to evaluate the crew's behaviour and the consequent mistrust of passengers who acted suspiciously.<sup>78</sup> Not every

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<sup>78</sup> I was told by a crew member I met at a shopping mall in St. John's in October, 1984, that the crew "knew I was a spotter because I sounded like a mainlander but said I was from Conception Bay" and I "asked too many questions about the boat." Field notebook 1, p. 111. My Colliers accent was not as pronounced because I had trained as a teacher and had lived in St. John's and on Canadian Armed Forces bases for eighteen of my thirty-four years. Field notebook 1.

crew member was apprehensive about my interest in the vessel. The chief engineer gave me a complete tour of the crew's facilities, including the engine rooms, and allowed me to interview him. The visit to the wheelhouse and interview with the engineer gave me a brief glimpse into the trip to the Labrador from the perspective of the crew and the dangers they had to face from icebergs, submerged rocks, and fatigue.

I was summoned up to the captain's quarters on the last morning of my trip after he had been informed that I had figured out what was happening. He thought it was quite a joke. He had known from the beginning that the crew thought I was a spy and he played along with it because, according to him, I was doing him a favour by keeping them in line. I was very upset by this and told him that I was here to do fieldwork on the Labrador fishery and felt that this trick of his had deprived me of opportunities to speak to people who had valuable information. He agreed, apologized, and asked if there was anything he could do to make up for it. I made two requests: first, that I be allowed to go down into the hold of the vessel as the fishermen had done up until the 1970s; and second, that I be given a list of the people who had gone on the Labrador to fish that year, who they were, where they came from, and where they had gone that year. He gladly complied with this.

In order to compensate for the stress generated by the misunderstanding, the first mate allowed one of the crew some time off to drive me to the hotel where I would catch a bus back to St. John's. By chance, I met a friend there and returned to St. John's in the comfort of a car rather than by bus, but I still felt very stifled being inside a car after having been practically three weeks outdoors, mostly on the water.



## Fieldwork in Colliers

I was born and lived in the community of Colliers until 1967. Colliers is comprised of several main sections: two coves, James and Burke's, the harbour (or Colliers central), Riverhead, the old road and the ridge.<sup>79</sup> My family lived in Riverhead, but my father's people came from Burke's Cove and the Harbour, and my maternal grandmother's people came from the old road and harbour area. Therefore, I had family connections in all the areas of Colliers.

As a child, I followed the traditional visiting patterns of the community, visiting the older people first with my grandmother and later with my Aunts as they returned on vacations to visit relatives and old neighbours. Visiting, or cruising as it was called, was done by the women in the afternoon after most of their housework was done. After entering the back door without knocking we would be invited to come in and sit. Even as the lady of the house was asking about our health and well-being, she would start preparing a "cup of tea" for us. This tea would be served with homemade or store bought sweets and/or homemade bread and jams. Conversation would mostly concentrate on the whereabouts and health of mutual friends and relatives as well as changes in the community. Visits would not last longer than an hour mostly because children would be coming home from school and supper would have to be prepared. We were always thanked for coming and invited to come back soon.

When I had decided on the Labrador fishery as a thesis, I asked my father for the names of people who had fished upon the Labrador. Not only did he provide me with

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<sup>79</sup> See Figure 2 in Chapter 1.



names, but he also took it upon himself to visit some of these people and let them know that I would be coming to talk to them about the Labrador fishery. More than once, I turned up on someone's doorstep to hear, "Your father said you were coming. What took you so long?" At the time, I no longer had my own vehicle, my children and I had moved to St. John's, and I was still doing courses in St. John's.

The interviews in Colliers were done mainly in two one-week segments. Again, I followed the fieldwork techniques I had learned as an undergraduate; I stopped at the Post Office, a place where people still gathered to talk and pass on news, to ask for names of people who could give me stories and songs of the Labrador. It just so happened that one of my former high school classmates was there as a substitute postmistress and mentioned that her father, Bill Foley, used to start singing a song about the Labrador when she was on her way to church on Sundays, and would still be singing it when she returned home.

I immediately went out to his house and he sang for me what he could remember of the song. He told me to go to Pad Cole, because he also used to sing the song. I went to Pad for that song, and the interview pattern continued that way, one lead following after another. I also interviewed the retired postmistress, the retired schoolteacher, the two oldest women in Colliers, the local historian, and as many crew members as I could. I tried to have at least one representative from each area of the community and as many women as possible. Because the crew structure spanned between Colliers and Conception Harbour, I interviewed people from Bacon Cove and Kitchuses in Conception Harbour as

well, and in the Old Age Home in Holyrood I interviewed a former resident of Conception Harbour.

For the most part, there was no difficulty in conducting the interviews. These people were known to have fished on the Labrador or had held status in the community as postmistress or the oldest resident. They were all very familiar with my family and I soon learned that my father, Jim Doyle, and his cousin, Tom Doyle, were considered to be the last of the Labrador fishermen in Colliers. I was continuously being reminded of this and asked, "Why are you interviewing me? They're the real Labrador fishermen."

Because my topic was the place of the Labrador fishery in the folklife of a Newfoundland community, I also collected information about the community of Colliers itself. I devised a questionnaire (Appendix B) in my first semester in the graduate program covering aspects of the Labrador fishery. At first, when I conducted interviews in the community, I did not normally call ahead, particularly when visiting people I knew. I would turn up on their doorstep. Even if they did not know me, they knew my father. I was told more than once that I was the "spittin' image" of my father; my face proved to be my passport into their kitchens. On one occasion, however, my father called one of his friends from the *Kyle* to arrange for us to visit, but he was unable to hear the response of the woman who answered the phone. He passed the phone to me, and after explaining the purpose of the call, I was told the man had been buried that morning. After this, I first checked with my parents to be sure the person was still alive and then called the house to make sure he or she was well enough to receive a visitor. As in the old days of visiting, the first ten minutes or so would be taken up with exchanging news about

families and my activities. I would explain to them the purpose of my visit because, in some cases, I was not sure if they could write and sign the archival contracts, and I did not want to embarrass any of them by asking them to do something they could not do.

I would explain that I was collecting information about the Labrador fishery for my thesis, and later a book on the Labrador fishery and that, with their permission, I would like to deposit the taped interviews in the folklore archive (MUNFLA) for the use of other scholars. I also explained that I preferred to use the tape recorder, because my memory was not the best and I probably could not write fast enough to take down the stories that they would tell me. I said that I was looking for their life stories.

Normally, I began by asking them when and where they were born, what it was like to grow up in Colliers, and then I would progress toward a discussion of the fishery. For the most part, they answered questions so fully and readily that very few additional questions were necessary. Once or twice, I tried to go back and interview people again, but I found that usually they said that they had told me all they could in an hour and that was it. Most were quite pleased to see me, while a few refused to be interviewed but contributed comments about what had been said by relatives. There was only one occasion where I ran into trouble. I was interviewing two bachelors, one of whom became quite taken with my "beautiful white teeth" and started to make advances toward me. I had to return a second time to interview him, and even though my father was present he still made passes at me. For the most part, the interviews were no different from visiting except that the topic of conversation was more focused and directed.



I made sure that people did not take for granted that I knew everything about the Labrador fishery, even though I am the daughter and granddaughter of Labrador fishermen. My father had retired from the Labrador fishery three years before I was born, and for the sixteen years I lived at home he was usually away working. We were a typical Newfoundland "single" family, being raised by the mother and grandmother,<sup>80</sup> while the father worked in various places around the island and in Labrador. From my father's point of view, it was unacceptable to be receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits if there was any work to be had anywhere in Newfoundland or Labrador.

Even if my father had been at home, he would have been more likely to talk to my brothers than to me, a girl. I simply knew, growing up, that my father had fished on the Labrador. I knew that my grandmother had been there, because she once mentioned that the Eskimos loved the colour red. That was the only statement I remember her making about being on the Labrador, but my mother and aunt recalled that she often spoke about the Labrador. It seems strange to have come from a fishing family and to know little of that life.<sup>81</sup> Men I interviewed also commented that they wished that they had paid more attention to what was being said when they were growing up. We were too busy with our own experiences to spend time studying the lives of those around us.

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<sup>80</sup> My father had moved in with my mother and her parents after they married in 1943. My grandfather died in 1951. As mentioned in the introduction, men often worked away from home. Therefore, despite having two parents, the children were usually raised by the mother and grandmother.

<sup>81</sup> For similar observations from the daughter of a miner, see Gail Weir, *The Wabana Iron Ore Miners of Bell Island, Conception Bay, Newfoundland: Their Occupational Folklife and Oral Folk History*, M.A. thesis, MUN 1986. Many of the Labrador fishermen worked at the mines in the fall and winter.

I certainly recall, as a child, trying to be around adult company as much as possible when visitors came. I can remember the sights and sounds of those gatherings, but I cannot remember much about conversations other than the inevitable recalling of genealogies. An older man in Rigolet, the son of a great story-teller, when asked by the editors of *Them Days* if he knew his father's tales, replied, "No, I was only a child. I was out playing and running around. I didn't want to be indoors listening to the stories."<sup>82</sup>

The Labrador fishery was very much a part of my community's cultural heritage. We knew we were connected to Labrador. As well, we knew we were connected to Ireland. I had visited Ireland in 1981. After my return from Labrador in 1984, my father stated I was the first of the DoYLES to go back to our "two other homes." But, the opportunities for talking about these significant places were not present in the home because of our way of life. My generation was the first one to go to school full-time. My mother left school after Grade III and my father finished with Grade VI, and as a result, they wanted education for their children. School was considered something that didn't end when we came through the door. Once chores were done, we were expected to "hit the books" until bedtime. It was "early to bed and early to rise" back then and visitors seldom came around on school nights. Again, in the summertime, in the early afternoons when the women would be coming to visit, we were usually outdoors doing chores or swimming, climbing trees, playing hopscotch, marbles, tiddlywinks, and cobby house.

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<sup>82</sup> Them Days Labrador Archive (TDLA), T057.



## Labrador Revisited

In addition to doing interviews in Colliers, I returned to Labrador in the spring of 1986. After two weeks of researching in the *Them Days* archives, I travelled to Rigolet for one week and conducted interviews with men and women identified as knowledgeable about the Newfoundlanders on the Labrador. Having been there in 1984 and having done so much reading about the Labrador, especially the newspaper accounts, I was accepted as someone who knew what she was talking about. I do not think anything was held back because I was from Newfoundland. I had been warned to expect a certain amount of resentment toward Newfoundlanders among Labradorians, but I did not experience tension of this sort. Most of my informants had ancestors or close friends from Newfoundland, and they did not consider Newfoundlanders to be any different from the Labradorians.

A field notebook was maintained on each of these trips. Unfortunately, since I was obliged to work for a living, there was a gap between the time of the interviews and the creation of the tape table of contents. Many of the elderly people whom I interviewed had since died or developed health problems, so there was no opportunity to follow up on things which occurred to me on hearing the tapes.

I certainly concluded from my experience of going to Labrador and interviewing people in Colliers and Rigolet, that the Labrador fishery played a very important part in the folk life of the community, even if it were only the fact that, when an interviewer came around, the subject stirred up memories and they talked about them. The fishery seemed to be something that was never far from their mind. For the most part, it was a



very positive experience for everyone. Just as my trip is still fresh in my mind today, their first trip to Labrador or the first summer they spent with the Newfoundland fishing families stays in their minds also.

The foregoing details of my field experiences were recorded on tape as personal experience narrative told, effectively, by myself as participant to myself as observer. The text was revised only when questioned by friends who read the chapter. It records only a small portion of the events I experienced on the Labrador and in Newfoundland. It does not describe how my nearly six years of experience as a participant observer in the folklife of a group home taught me to be always attuned to my surroundings and to watch body language and listen for rising voice inflections as a sign of potential danger. It does not describe completely the racism of the crew towards the Innu and Inuit passengers. Nor does it record the harassment I endured from a tourist from St. John's, who went so far as to make a derogatory remark to a Labrador man I was interviewing, much to the mortification of myself and three nearby passengers and to the embarrassment of the Labradorian. "He's all right in small doses," explained a medical student travelling with the St. John's man. Even his wife made a point of telling me not to mind him.

### **Summary**

Looking back at my experience of going on the Labrador and indeed, of doing archival research fieldwork in the relative safety of my home community, what this author/fieldworker can best offer to future female fieldworkers in terms of advice is to warn them to proceed with caution. I lived for a short time the experience many female fieldworkers as well as women in the Labrador fishery have also experienced, but

experiences about which few participants, even trained researchers, have spoken or written. Even my mother and my aunt, her sister, Nell, briefly referred to but would not expand upon their sister, Angela, being “chased after” by a man on the Labrador whom she was not interested in as she favoured another man. I had years of being a trained observer before I ventured into folklore but, within my short time on the Labrador, the dark side of fieldwork was very much in evidence. I was ridiculed, threatened with seduction and loss of life, hampered in my research because of my perceived role as a spy for Canadian National Marine (CN) and rejected more than once because of my university education. I was warned in advance that the wrong luggage would turn people against me and that flies could kill me. But more damaging was what years of university had done to my native dialect. While some CN staff saw me as a teacher following in the footsteps of my people who had fished on the Labrador, as indeed I was, other CN staff thought of me as a spy because “I did not have my native Colliers dialect, I asked too many questions and I watched everything.”

Ideally, the trip on the Labrador should have been taken with my father and recorded on videotape. The project was put together too quickly and with too small a budget to allow me to have him as my travelling companion and protector. Still, his presence during fieldwork in Conception Harbour did not prevent the unwelcome advances of the informant who, as he said, “was madly in love with my face and, especially, my white teeth.” He asked me to be “his housekeeper with bedroom privileges.” While he was, perhaps, not potentially harmful, he was very persistent and he

did frighten me. His behaviour did not improve on the return visit I had to make and, in Dad's presence, he reiterated his request.

The trip to the Labrador was planned too quickly and taken at the wrong time for interviews, as I found out. The fishing was poor that year. Money was scarce. It appeared in contrast that I was a rich university teacher who, after nearly eighteen years of living away from my home community and earning several university degrees, along with socializing with people from outside Newfoundland, was rich in comparison with the people I was interviewing. This chapter summarized how much I learned from my experiences but also what I lost because of lack of trust, which in some cases, was very cruel. While this was, basically, my fourth experience of being the "new girl" or "fresh meat" as I was perceived by men in the community, it was the most intense experience of my life. Sexual harassment was evident both on campus and on the Labrador. The difference being that, on the Labrador, I was separated from the safety net of my children and my family, my colleagues and boyfriend, and subconsciously seduced by the romance of the sea and life away from responsibilities. In hindsight, I would have worn a sweatshirt stating, "My father fished at Splitting Knife on Cutthroat Island. I'm fishing for stories to earn a degree, not spying for CN."

The following chapters look at the individual components of the trip to the Labrador in more detail, exploring the folklore generated and/or exchanged during each segment.



## CHAPTER 3

### GOING IN COLLAR AND ON THE PASSAGE

Chapter Two presented the description of a modern-day trip to the Labrador to set the framework for description of each component of the trip. This chapter presents two of these components: “going in collar” (preparing for the trip) and “on the passage” (the trip down to the Labrador). The former component marks the beginning of the separation from home, family, and community life, and the start of the incorporation into the crew with whom the next four months would be spent. Time “on the passage” allowed the group formation to solidify while providing the opportunity to rest between work periods. This rest period, the last block of free time until the fish was shipped, was also the last opportunity for large group interaction until the return passage in the fall. The traditions surrounding “going in collar” and time “on the passage” can be viewed as an extended process of separation.

#### **Going in Collar: Narratives of the Voyage**

If a fisherman did not own a schooner (floater) or a room (fishing premise) on the Labrador, he would seek a position (berth) either as a crew member on a schooner or as shareman with a stationer (a fisherman who owned a room).<sup>83</sup> The Newfoundland fishermen refer to this acquiring of a position and either preparations for the trip as

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<sup>83</sup> Floater referred both to the schooner and to the fishermen who fished from it. A shareman received a share of the fish, usually ten quintals out of one hundred quintals. Quintal meant one hundredweight (112 pounds). Explanations of the vernacular terms used here are given in Story, et al. For “going in collar,” see collar.

“going in collar,” which marks the beginning of the process of separation from home, family, and community life. The length of time away from home in the fishery varied from place to place and year to year. Depending on weather and ice conditions, the fishery could begin in May and end in November, with the average voyage lasting from early June to late September. In the following section I will attempt to build a composite account of “going in collar” and the voyage to Labrador from 1867 to 1947 as given in archival and published accounts, and in my own fieldwork. To distinguish my field research from other archival accounts, I have used abbreviations to replace names in interviews other than mine.

Saunders gives a good account of the work necessary to maintain the schooners for the Labrador:

... quite a lot of work was involved in general repairs: sails to be made and sewn; rigging to be replaced and repaired; general repairs to the hull such as re-placing planks or bulwark; painting and caulking.<sup>84</sup>

This work would last from April to May. Then the ships would be loaded with salt and general cargo.

In the meantime, stationers would be making their arrangements. Hussey gives a similar account of preparations necessary for the stationers.

During the winter, at home, we would spin wool and knit mitts for the men who worked on the fishing stage. We hooked mats to replace the ones that we took on [the] Labrador with us and help mesh some of the twine for Pop. Pop would either have repaired or made his two cod traps and barked them by boiling them in water to which cutch and pitch had been added to preserve the netting. Late in May he

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<sup>84</sup> Saunders, pp. 127-128.

would pack up the cod traps along with ropes, moorings, salmon nets and everything else that was needed for the summer down on the Labrador. Some of the things that we took were pots, pans, dishes, cooking gear and most of the rough grub that we lived on, hard bread, sugar, butter and salt pork. All of this was packed mostly in barrels and in what was known as the Labrador box which was a homemade trunk with a lock. Our clothes and empty bottles to use to bring home a few bakeapples also went into the Labrador box. The old tradition was that each crew member would bring along a fruit cake made by some of his family. This too was packed in his Labrador box along with his clothing. All of this was loaded aboard a fishing boat and taken to the coastal boat. Some crews took along their hens and goats to provide them with milk and eggs.<sup>85</sup>

Similar accounts of the work involved in preparing for the Labrador are given in nearly all of the relevant archival sources.<sup>86</sup>

Certain traditions surrounded the leave-taking of the floaters. Mrs. D. of Caplin Cove, Bonavista Bay, who made three trips to the Labrador between 1923 and 1925, gives this description.

The crew and all on board would say good-bye by singing and blowing the ship's horn until they were out of sight. They would sing:

(1) We're out, we're bound  
We cannot stay here  
Good-bye fare thee well  
Good-bye fare thee well

(2) The girls in town  
We'll have them come down  
Hurrah my bully boys  
We're outward bound

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<sup>85</sup> Hussey, pp. 4-5.

<sup>86</sup> The traditional cake was not mentioned in other sources.



The second stanza was taunting the women who would miss them.<sup>87</sup>

The use of the verb “taunting” suggests that there was a status in going on the Labrador. Not everybody could go: some had to stay home to look after the land and kitchen gardens; some people were too old or too feeble to go; some could not take the voyage itself; others wanted to go but could not get a berth because they were not considered good or skilled enough.

Mrs. D. spoke of the status of the role of cook on the Labrador. On board the schooner, she would be the only female treated with “deference” by the crew. “They look after the cook.” If the cook went up on deck to take a spell [rest], people passing by would call “Hi, Cook.” Mrs. D. also said that “she had more time to herself on board” and that “there was excitement in going on a long voyage to see new places and people.”<sup>88</sup> Her description reads like an advertisement for a luxury liner cruise. Indeed some of the people I met on the passage referred to going on the Labrador as if they were going to their summer cabins for a vacation. The trip to the Labrador, however, did not fall into the category of a luxury cruise as the following passage proves:

Men, women, and children would be accommodated in each hold of the ship below the main deck. Sleeping quarters for each family would be provided by spreading canvas on the salt [used in curing fish] and separating each family by nailing canvas to the deck beams; making rooms to suit each individual family. Most of the cooking for these families was done on deck. If the ships struck fair

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<sup>87</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 81-483, pp. 12-13.

<sup>88</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 81-483, p. 9.

weather, the trip could be accomplished in a few days, if adverse winds and weather were met, the voyage was considerably delayed and I might say, this added greatly to the discomforts that the passengers endured in such cramped quarters. They were seasick and often had nothing of an appetizing nature to eat. For light, ordinary oil lamps were hung to the beams or some other convenient place. Thus they journeyed to the Labrador coast in search of codfish.<sup>89</sup>

A vivid description of the voyage under adverse conditions comes from a 1867 logbook entry made in Indian Harbour.

An old lady who came off with her family to prayers who by the by bought me some preserved bakeapples and some wild flowers, very like hyacinth, but what they called "farewell summer" being the last of the wild flowers which bloom; gave me a few incidents in her last voyage. In a brigantine 175 tons there were upwards of 200 men, women and children stowed in the hold on a tier of hogsheads of salt; the main hatch gave them light and air, there was no communication with the fore and aft parts of the ship; on deck were a tier of casks on the top of which were thirteen boats, skiffs, punts and c. [sic] Among these dogs, goats, poultry, pigs, provisions, and all the six months stores for these 200 people! It came on the blow, no ropes could be got at, one boat was cut away, the thirteen were washed away! The sea went down the main hatchway, the master (if he deserved the term master) was going to batten down; one of the women's husbands came forward and said "he would rather see the whole ship go than lose his wife." And if the hatches were battened down he would break in the bulkheads to give them air, for otherwise they would be suffocated; (most of the crew were half drunk). The weather moderated and the hatchways were not battened down.

In the outline I have here drawn (and I have been assured by many that it is not an exaggerated one, but of frequent occurrence) I have the fearful picture to be filled in; the scene of sea sickness, the dirt, the cries of children, the screams of terrified mothers mingled with the noise of the storm and the cursings of the drunken crew, is one not less dreadful than that of a slave ship! Nearly thirty thousand have to be brought annually to Labrador and taken back again! in this manner.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Saunders, p. 128.

<sup>90</sup> Commander W. Chimmo (R. N.) *Journal of a Voyage to Labrador in H.M.S Gannet, 1867*, Center for Newfoundland Studies Archives, OMF-40, pp. 33-34.



Some of the reasons why people were willing to endure the discomforts of the voyage to the Labrador are given in the following summaries. Mrs. R. of South River, Conception Bay, was eleven years old in 1913 when she first went on the Labrador. Her father had died and she secured the position of babysitter and assistant cook for one crew at a wage of ten dollars, while her mother went as cook for another crew. According to the following passage, Mrs. R. was young compared to some of the girls hired out to work.

Few skippers would take girls as cooks unless they had some experience, cook reasonably well and do household chores, girls of fifteen or sixteen years would be hired. Younger girls went as cooks for their own families. A position could be obtained through inquiry among friends, relatives or people known to engage in the Labrador fishery. The girl would go to see him. Occasionally a skipper would come to see a girl he had heard about in this manner. The girl would spend a week or so immediately prior to the trip with the family of her employers learning his likes and dislikes and her duties [types of meals to cook].<sup>91</sup>

Mrs. R. said the trip down took anywhere from four to five days to two weeks and there was little to do on the trip but sit around and talk or go out on deck if you weren't too seasick.<sup>92</sup>

Accounts have been given of young boys pestering their relatives to take them to the Labrador. However, not all boys wanted to go. Some did not want to go at all and at least one boy refused to go until he was assured a wage. An account from Brigus said some boys cried because they had to leave school to go on the Labrador.<sup>93</sup> No account is

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<sup>91</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 78-188, pp. 2-5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-618, p. 17.



given of men being refused a berth, but no doubt, there were some cases of that when the men were not "good men."<sup>94</sup>

Mr. V. first went to the Labrador on his father's schooner in 1914 at the age of twelve. He was terribly seasick on his first trip but never again. He went back to fish in Batteau, Cut Throat, Cape Harrison, Rugged Island, and Groswater Bay.<sup>95</sup> Mr. F. of South River, Conception Bay, went to the Labrador at age nine in 1901. On this trip there were eighty people plus a number of goats, dogs, and a pig or two. The next year his father bought a schooner and they became floaters for thirty-six years.<sup>96</sup> Mr. T. of Swain's Island, Bonavista Bay, started fishing at the age of nine because "fishing was the way of life in the community."<sup>97</sup> Mr. C. started fishing in 1906 at age twelve. His job on the Labrador was to pack fish on a schooner that was collecting fish for a merchant. Mr. C., who was also a sealer like many of the fishermen, bought a ticket on the sealing vessel the *Newfoundlander* for fifty cents in 1914 and lost his right leg and left foot to frostbite in a sealing disaster.<sup>98</sup>

Mr. S. from Spaniard's Bay, Conception Bay, went to the first of fifty-nine summers on the Labrador at the age of ten in 1911. He had never seen the cod seines as they were used on the Labrador before he went, but "I used to hear tell of 'em."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Smith, p. 98.

<sup>95</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-520.

<sup>96</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-335.

<sup>97</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-535, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-177.

<sup>99</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-456, p. 24.

Mr. C. of Spaniard's Bay was born April 23, 1893 and made his first trip to the Labrador June 1 of the same year on his father's schooner. Captain Gosse of the schooner *Rose* raced Mr. C.'s father down to the Labrador to secure a choice berth and had made a cradle out of a flour barrel for the baby Mr. C. before they arrived. The construction of the cradle shows that the competition for prime berths does not preclude neighbourly acts. The following year, 1894, Captain Gosse lost his schooner when she struck a skirt of ice in what Mr. C. refers to as "The *Rose* Disaster", adding:

the fishermen of Newfoundland are definitely the salt of the earth. Those were hard, hard, anxious times. It was a case of men must work and women must weep, though storms be sudden and waters deep.<sup>100</sup>

In 1895, Mr. C.'s father lost his schooner when a gale came on in the harbour and the ship went ashore. They went home in another schooner and in 1896 went down to the Labrador on a brig, a ship with yards on both the foremast and the mainmast.<sup>101</sup>

Voyages tend to be remembered by events rather than by years, and the hardships faced on the passages are commemorated in song as well as in personal experience narrative. The following song tells not only of being jammed in ice in Ice Ticks (q.v. Figure 3, 22), but also records the names of those aboard on this particular trip. I collected the song initially from Bill Foley of Colliers, though at first he was reluctant to sing it because he could not remember all the words, but he agreed to sing what he could remember. He then sent me to his neighbour, Pad Cole, who also used to sing the song. I recorded and transcribed both songs onto a single sheet and returned to both men with the

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<sup>100</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 74-189, p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

transcribed songs and a better recorder. Bill did not agree with some of the wording used by Pad. He said that he had not remembered any more verses but when he did sing it, he added in a few lines.

The Big Three-Masted Schooner: Bill Foley' version

(1) It being on the sixth of June my boys as you may understand  
Along with Captain Healey in Ice Ticks we got jammed  
Now to tell you of our troubles now I must never fear  
And our big three master was on the bum to steer

(2) Oh the boom fell on the booby and it made a lot of noise  
Some of us did not mind it but I mean the common boys  
There was Tom Cole from the cabin he got an awful fright  
I looked behind the pump box and his gills were turning white

(3) Now it is of Johanna Ratchford I have no more to say  
[see Pad Cole's version for additional line]  
He crippled Johnny Boonet [Skanes]  
I'm sorry to relate  
He says I'll tell my Daddy when the grey box I do take

(4) Now the fellows who threw the water down I mean to tell you plain  
It was Spindle Shanks from Avondale, George Mason was his name  
And when he struck our cod traps sure I thought I would burst  
And when he struck our cod traps why Paddy Walsh was first

(5) Now Ned Trahey stood in the booby and I know he had it bad  
To see the face of Joey Puckett would make your heart feel sad  
And up speaks Dickie Foley and sang turn up the light  
He jumped up in the booby and swore a ripping oath



Saying, "Come down Davey Kenney your traps are all afloat"

(6) Now my song is ended I have no more to say  
To go home in the big three master I'd give my summer pay  
We're certain of a ripping time and I won't say anymore  
And I'll never forget my last trip down on the Labrador  
(underlined words spoken).<sup>102</sup>

Pad's version is very similar to Bill's version but has some word changes and an additional verse (3.1). Changes have been underlined for ease of comparison.

The Big Three Masted Schooner: Pad Cole's version

(1) It being on the sixth of June my boys as you may understand  
Going down with Captain Healey in Ice Ticks we got jammed  
Now to tell you of our troubles the wind was never fair  
And our old three master was on the bum to steer

(2) Oh the boom fell on the booby and it made a lot of noise  
Some of us did not mind it but I mean the common boys  
There was Tom Cole from the cabin he got an awful fright  
When he looked behind the pump box and his gills were turning white

(3) Now it is of Johanna Ratchford I have no more to say  
Peg Nowlan caught her by the leg and could not make her stay  
There was Neddie Sinjon [St. John]'s hero, Peg Nowlan's only son  
T'was like the summer's showers when the goats began to run

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<sup>102</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8685, C8695.

(3.1) When the water came in the hole sure Paddy Walsh was first  
He jumped up in the booby saying Kate turn off the light  
He crippled Johnny Boonet [Skanes]  
I'm sorry to relate  
He says I'll tell my Daddy when the grey box I do take

(4) Now the fellows who threw the water down I mean to tell you plain  
It was Spindle Shanks from Avondale, George Mason was his name  
And when he struck our cod traps sure I thought I would burst  
And when he struck our cod traps why Paddy Walsh was first

(5) Now Ned Trahey stood in the booby and I know he had it bad  
To see the face of Joey Puckett would make your heart feel sad  
And up jumps Dickie Foley and swore a ripping oath  
Saying, "Come down Davey Kenney your traps are all afloat"

(6) Now my song is ended I have no more to say  
To go home in the big three master I'd give my summer pay  
We're certain of a ripping time and I won't say anymore  
And I'll never forget my last trip down on the Labrador  
(underlined words spoken).<sup>103</sup>

This mishap took place c. 1904. Kate Foley who had spent sixteen summers on the Labrador composed the song after having been shipwrecked. Jose Mason, "an old lady who lived somewhere down the harbour," and several other people helped Kate to compose the song. Kate also helped compose "Charming Katie Flynn," which shall be

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<sup>103</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8686.

discussed shortly. "The Big Three-Masted Schooner" was not collected by Paddy Ryan of Colliers for his privately published *Ryan's Favourites*.<sup>104</sup>

The monotony of the passage was broken by song, dance, games and stories. Mr. R. of Upper Island Cove, Conception Bay, was nine years old on his first trip to the Labrador. He had been playing the accordion since the age of six and was permitted among the men to supply the music.

Time was spent in singing, playing music, cooking and sleeping in the hole [sic]. There was many a story passed from one to another at this time.<sup>105</sup>

The primary function of these events was amusement or relief from enforced idleness.<sup>106</sup> However, they served other functions as well. The men were conforming to acceptable patterns of behaviour and initiating newcomers into their group through the narratives. The voyage was a transitional period; the potentially hazardous voyage and the summer fishery meant they had to put differences of religion and ethnic background behind them and be prepared to work for the good of all. "Seasoned passengers" could be depended upon to lend assistance in case of emergencies such as storms. Although no texts appear of the stories told on the passage, it can be posited that they tended to focus

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<sup>104</sup> Ryan's Favourites: Old Songs of Newfoundland. Published by M.P. Ryan, Colliers, Newfoundland, 1957. Printed by Guardian Limited, St. John's, 96 Water Street. (Sung by the people of Newfoundland in the days of the Publisher's youth to the best of his knowledge and memory). It should be noted here that Kate could neither read nor write but she could spell every word she heard. "Charming Katie Flynn" was later sung for me by John Ryan, Paddy Ryan's grandson. See MUNFLA 86-013, C8701, C8702.

<sup>105</sup> MUNFLA, ms. , 79-400, pp. 7-8.

<sup>106</sup> William Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," 1954; rpt. *The Study of Folklore*, Ed. Alan Dundes, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1965.



on previous journeys and the same type of stories told to the student collectors, a fair sampling of which has been given here. From these stories, the newcomers would be receiving advice in narrative form of what to expect for the next few months from the weather, the land, the Inuit and the "huskies" (dogs) ; foreign fishermen; supernatural forces, etc. From these stories the novice Labrador fishermen could learn appropriate responses to common problem situations, while the experienced fishermen built up status and justified their continual participation in the Labrador fishery. Inherent also in the stories is the feeling that "everybody was in this together."

As will be shown in the next chapter, there were no formal apprenticeships in the Labrador fishery. Children learned correct procedures informally, observing and imitating as they worked alongside the more experienced adults. Parents often filled the role of teacher, initiating their children into the fishery way of life and instructing them in the necessary skills. Unfortunately, for some children their education was cut short when their fathers died, forcing them early on to assume adult roles.<sup>107</sup>

### **Experiences of People from Colliers**

The previous section describes various archival and published accounts of going in collar. The following section, based on my own research, profiles the Labrador fishery experiences of Colliers' men.

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<sup>107</sup> For example, a nine-year-old boy on his first voyage lost his father; see Chapter 4, "Belief" section. An eleven year old girl whose father had died was babysitter and assistant cook for one family while her mother cooked for another (MUNFLA, ms., 79-400, p. 10).

Tom Doyle was born in Colliers in 1908 and went to the Labrador for the first time at the age of twelve. He went with his father, Pad Doyle, and uncle, Jim Doyle (my grandfather). There were usually five men and a cook in the crew. The cook would sometimes be one of his sisters, Alice or Bess, or other girls. After his father died, he went fishing on the Labrador for himself, and hired Bob O'Toole's wife, Kit, as a cook.

He went on the Labrador because "that's where we spent our life time, my father before me too. We went every year."<sup>108</sup> He does not recall his father telling any stories about the Labrador. He only remembered that his father was going and that he wanted to go also. He went down between the middle of May and the first of June. They would usually leave from Conception Harbour, although some years they would leave from Brigus on one of J.W. Hiscock's schooners or on the steamer *Kyle*. The men slept wherever they could get in to rest.

Tom also went to the ice, hunting seals for fifteen summers. He would return from the ice in the latter part of April and get the ground ready for planting and then go to Labrador. There would be eight barrels of seed set out for his mother to tend. She would hire whomever she could to cut the hay. His mother had cows, a horse, and sheep to look after while they were gone.

Tom's mother was a Skanes who lived near Ghaney's Bridge. They often sold potatoes, lambs and cattle to the South Shore (now Conception Bay South) men before the butcher shop opened in Colliers. The butchers in the area were Tom Ghaney in Colliers, Bob Kennedy in Conception Harbour and Morris Kennedy in Avondale.

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<sup>108</sup> MUNFLA 89-013, C8678.



George Cole of Colliers first went on the Labrador in 1936 at the age of twenty-six years with Fred Wade from Conception Harbour. They fished with traps in Cut Throat out to Five Island. George had 250 quintals of fish but, because fish was only \$1.50 a quintal, he ended up \$19.00 in the hole. He made his next trip in 1942 or 1943 from May to October with James Doyle Jr. and Sr. (my father and grandfather). He did "Pretty good, over 300 quintals." The next summer he went with the Doyles again, and with fish at \$3.50 a quintal, he made some money.

In the following quote, George talks about his work life, as well as his time on the Labrador.

Loved the Labrador. Loved fishing. Summer wouldn't be long enough. Wouldn't know where the time went, although we'd get up at 4:30, go to the traps 3 trips a day. If we had any fish may be at it until 11 or 12:00. Enjoyed being with old Jimmy Doyle.

When they bring home the fish they share it - 3 quintals - share - winter fish. Generally I sold 1 or 2 quintals and keep one for meself. Girl - cook - Alice Doyle. Alice Burke was her name. Next summer Rache Gushue. Both pretty good. Only youngsters about 16 years old. Bess was down with her brother Tom - down for hisself. When Uncle Pad died he went for hisself. First summer I and Tom Cole from Kitchuses, Sam Lewis, father and grandmother. Next summer Mattie Gushue, Tom Cole, same fella, me, your father, and grandfather. [I had] bad nerves so I went to the Labrador to see if I would get all right. Never had it since. Went back to iron work. Worked all over. The [American] bases in '41 in Argentia. Goose Bay couple summers. Stephenville - '62 - retired. Worked at Fort Pepperell. Pay good for that time. 75 cents an hour. 25 cents around here. Americans got three times as much (government policy). Knew that but had to go to work. Made \$35 or \$40 a week - lot of money. Went to the States - iron work at 18; went with me brothers. Jim Cole had a good job in the union later. Two brothers Pad and Bill - still in Brooklyn. Sister in Philadelphia. Sister Angela in Florida. Mother 91 when she died. Katherine Hearn, me sister, 82 when she died. Brother died last year. Mother had 13 children: 7 lived.

Left on the *Kyle* from Conception Harbour. Generally call into Brigus, Harbour Grace, Carbonear, St. Anthony, Battle Harbour, as far as Nain sometimes.



Generally take 8-10 days. On her one time coming up Indian Tickle in a storm, there when there was no good anchorage [and we were] two or three days in a raging wind storm 100 miles.

Chris Cullum got lost[drowned] putting stuff aboard. Himself and Joey Walsh. [I] wasn't on the Labrador then. September in the 1930s.<sup>109</sup>

Jim Doyle, who is profiled in the following chapter, told a string of narratives that illustrate that going on the Labrador was a rite of passage into manhood. The first account describes the custom of a having a meal and a drink in a public house in Conception Harbour before boarding the vessel and leaving for the Labrador. The second story takes place in Labrador and tells of him trying to pass as a man by acting like one and shaving with a straight-edged razor. The final account illustrates Jim's acceptance as a man when, under age, he succeeds in the task of buying liquor in St. John's for the men.

There was one spring when we were going to the Labrador, the *Kyle* came up in Conception. All the crews got taken to the Church and that's where she headed. We went up to Mickey Doyle's. He had what you call a public house, two rooms. You could get a lunch there. You go in and get a lunch, probably a sandwich and forty cents for a bottle of beer... He had a table license. You had to go in and get your meal and you would get a drink with it. And we put our stuff aboard first and meself and me father and Uncle Pad and I don't know but Tom and Matt (was there too) and I went up. I don't know but I was only sixteen or seventeen and I don't know how I got in with them. We all got aboard loaded [drunk]... They didn't have the gear half stored aboard then. Took 'em all day and all night and I don't know but the next day to load her... I got in. When I got the beer, I was loaded drinking. I was only [supposed to be] eating lunch and I was drinking bottle for bottle, forty cents a bottle. Had to be twenty-one to drink. I was big enough to be twenty-one. Even had a beard. I was about sixteen.

I used to steal the old man's razor and go down on the stage and shave when I was eleven or twelve on the Labrador. Straight razor. Take the razor and go on down the stage and have a shave. Wipe off the razor and bring her back and put her where she was at. No soap. No water. No nothin'. No mirror. Wonder I didn't cut

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<sup>109</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8689.

me throat. ..Shaved so they could see me with the razor. [J.W. "Suppose the way it was then, if you didn't have a beard on, you were only a boy."] Everybody was calling you a child then. I was only small when I was thirteen years old. I was about sixteen before I started to stretch out. Went to the Labrador one spring I was [only small]. I come back in the fall, the shirt was up to that [points halfway up his arm]. I grew about a foot in the summer. I was sixteen that fall. I had a whisker then.

I went to town (St. John's) when I was seventeen, meself and Jack White (from Bacon Cove) to get a [liquor] book to get a bottle of rum. I was out in town. He was there then and he was after getting one. You could only get one bottle on a book. He gave me the money and said, "Go in now and get a book." Fifty cents to get a book and dollar fifty for a bottle of screech. He gave me two dollars. I went in, had an overcoat on. I hauled him up. I was dark with the beard on. Went in. Got the book and came down and the fella tending the bar giving out the liquor looked at me said "As long as he gave you the liquor book, I'll give you the bottle of rum." He knowed I wasn't twenty-one. [He was] Tom Mahoney from Conception. He knowed me.

Leaving home to go on the Labrador was the beginning of Jim's initiation into manhood. In the shaving story he is a child pretending to be a man. The excessive drinking narrative demonstrates his transition into the group through participation in the customs of men experienced in going on the Labrador. In the final story, he is sent by the men to do a man's job, signifying his incorporation into and his acceptance as an adult.

### **On the Passage**

Travelling accommodations on the schooners were not ideal, as has been shown, and in adverse winds and weather they would worsen considerably. The patience and stamina of the passengers would be sorely tried if the vessel was delayed for days or weeks by being stuck in ice. Even at the best of times tempers could be worn thin by the antics of inconsiderate fellow travellers.



One time, I remember, we were travelling to the coast on the sealer, the SS *Ungava*. As usual, the young men were down around the girls' beds like flies around a molasses keg. Some were singing songs and another had a concertina. There was very little opportunity to get a good nap. Aunt Emily Taylor, of Cupids, put up with it as long as she could. Then she got up and grabbing a bed lath, took off after the boys and chased them up the companionway to the deck above.<sup>110</sup>

No mention is made in the archival accounts I read and interviews I conducted of fights on the passage but there are references to tricks and pranks being played for enjoyment.

When they were travelling on the schooners, the men had to do all the cooking for their families. The men created their own galley on deck by "rigging up" a fireplace made from rocks placed in a puncheon. Some men used the occasion of bringing food to the women as an enticement to share the sleeping accommodations, as the following quote illustrates:

All the girls had bunks. All the rest of the girls get sick. I never. Ten days in the hold--not allowed up. Father cooked. Jack Mahoney from North River. He was a devil. He used to crawl into bed with me. I said don't get into bed with me or me father will kill ya. Jack used to cook big dinners to bring in to me. Used to throw salt into their eyes and everything. Anastasia Walsh from Bacon Cove was crack about the old man. I used to throw salt at her.<sup>111</sup>

Ann Grace recalls that the girls used to have "a grand time" even though many of them were strangers to each other. On the schooners they used to sleep on the piles of fishing twine. They had bunks in the steamer and had to dress for bed despite the frequent

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<sup>110</sup> Hussey, p. 7.

<sup>111</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.



visits from the men. "All the girls were sick. It was rough and everything. They used to drive [the men] out. Paddy Skanes had a sister in every bunk."<sup>112</sup>

Accommodations for the men aboard ship were substandard, but the conditions under which they were forced to prepare their food were equally poor and sometimes led to petty thefts.<sup>113</sup>

We'd spend a good bit of our time lined up to the galley, trying to get a kettle boiled. You had to take your turn in on the galley stove. No way to make a fire. If you wanted three meals a day, it took all day. There were so many men, twenty crews, over one hundred men. The cook'd be as mad as hell if you spilled anything on the stove or if you did anything wrong. [I] got in trouble one day, myself and Pad Whelan walking along by the galley. It was between meals. The cook was making some kind of cookies, I think it may have been fish cakes. He had a pile of those on the stove on a plate. It was very tempting for us, so we watched our chance, and he turned his back. He went out to go along the deck for something. We nipped in and stuck two or three of these cakes in our pockets, and went on. As soon as he came in, he missed the cakes. He started the uproar. He came out cursing and swearing. We hid. He didn't catch us. I don't think he ever found out, although he gave us some black looks. I think he had his suspicions who it was. They had a saloon for a few people. This is where the fancy stuff was made up for the merchants, priests, doctors, crew, but not the fishermen. Fancy meals. The fishing crews had to forage for themselves. They had to get out and boil the kettle they had their own grub, and slept down in the hold.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8684.

<sup>113</sup> For a discussion of petty theft as a form of diversion in the seal fishery see John R. Scott, "Practical Jokes of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974), p. 279.

<sup>114</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700. Eileen Condon informs me that her father told her a story about American World War II navy men expressing similar food-related resentments by stealing and tossing overboard a coveted ice-cream maker which officers refused to share. Personal communication, 1991.

## **Sex on the Passage**

Sometimes when I was interviewing, people gave very intimate details from their lives and when I asked if I should erase these from the tape, they made statements such as, "No. That's our life as it was and that's how it should stay." The intimate details they were reluctant to have traced back to them dealt with sexual behaviour. Sometimes, they would start to say something and then hesitate. When I reminded them that I was older than I appeared and the mother of two teenagers at the time, they would sometimes relax, feeling that I could relate to their experiences.

Some of the narratives told under requirement of anonymity were tricks that they would play in the darkened holds of the vessels. The accommodations in steerage were segregated even for married couples. One story is of a courting couple who were separated by a canvas sail. There was a hole in the sail that the man would put his finger through for the woman to stroke. After a while, he decided to put his penis in instead and she stroked it. Because one of the participants was still living, no one wanted to name who they were. They did get quite a kick out of telling the story to me.

Despite the regulations and the lack of privacy, sexual activity was engaged in on the voyage to the Labrador. Judy McGrath, in an untaped interview, told me that when she and Doris Saunders were doing their research for the *Kyle* issue of the *Them Days*



*Magazine*,<sup>115</sup> they were told that married couples carried on normal sexual relations.

Unmarried couples also would conduct sexual affairs.

One story told in Labrador is of a love affair that occurred when the boat was stuck in ice for three weeks. A Newfoundland girl made love with a Labrador man, but she refused to tell him her name. At the end of the three weeks, when he was about to leave the vessel, she decided that she would tell him her name. He said, "Don't bother, my dear. It doesn't make any difference anyway." It seems as if sex was a casual undertaking for both sexes, as it may have been for "charming Katie Flynn" in the "ship's hold below." The following song was collected from Pad Cole, but the text had already been collected by M. P. Ryan.<sup>116</sup> Cole's variant wordings are given in brackets.

"Charming Katie Flynn"

1. [Now] Ye shipmates all sit down a while and listen to my song  
I hope you'll pay attention; I won't delay you long.  
I am a youth, to tell the truth, my age scarce twenty-four;  
It's [was] my first voyage from Newfoundland going on the Labrador.

2. Leaving our friends behind us [all in...] ('Twas in the blooming spring)  
We sailed in the *Sebastian*, commanded by Captain Dennis Flynn,

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<sup>115</sup> Personal communication, May 2, 1986; *Them Days* 9:4 (1984) is a special issue devoted to documenting the role of the *S.S. Kyle* in the Labrador fishery from 1914-1958. See also Thomson.

<sup>116</sup> *Ryan's Favourites: Old Songs of Newfoundland*. Published by M.P. Ryan, Colliers, Newfoundland, 1957. Printed by Guardian Limited, St. John's, 96 Water Street. (Sung by the people of Newfoundland in the days of the Publisher's youth to the best of his knowledge and memory.) It should be noted here that Kate could neither read nor write but she could spell every word she heard. "Charming Katie Flynn" was later sung for me by John Ryan, Paddy Ryan's grandson. See MUNFLA 86-013, C8701, C8702.



We were eight brave heroes [six jolly sailor boys] all in our youth of bloom  
And we sailed away from Salmon Cove[now Avondale] on the eighteenth day of  
June.

3. We had some lady passengers whom our crew did adore,  
Some from Conception Harbour going [to] on the Labrador;  
[To] You'd hear these girls in our ship's hold - so merrily they would sing!  
And one among their numbers was [Miss] charming Katie Flynn.

4. [Sure I being] I was young, and in my prime, as you may understand  
I fixed my eye on that fair maid [girl] before we left the land;  
I fixed my eye on that fair maid before we left the shore,  
Determined for to court her while [going] on the Labrador.

5. [No] I did not fall in love with her, 'twas only for a lark,  
I did not mind her beauty (in our ship's hold 'twas dark)  
Until one night I was betrayed in our ship's hold below:  
[May a] My curse attend that false young man that proved my overthrow!

6. Likewise to any false young man his shipmate [to] did betray,  
Likewise to any false young girl throwing her first love away,  
[To believe] Liberties in false persuadings her first love to give o'er,  
And slights [her] the loyal companion going on the Labrador.

7. [Cole omitted verse seven except for two false starts, "Now going in," and "Oh  
yes they said".]

I went in our ship's hold one night myself for to enjoy,  
The girls they all laughed at me, they said "You're left poor boy!"  
Up went the cry: "You're left, poor boy! I told you that before,  
Don't depend on any female kind going on the Labrador

8. I will not fail to tell the tale or yet this fair maid's name,

Her name it is Miss Katie Flynn, she lives [in] near Harbour Main;  
Otherwise up on the ridge I can [can't] remind it still  
[But if I'm not mistaken] Otherwise upon the ridge she lives near Heartbreak Hill

9. We sailed away for the Labrador with a sweet and pleasant gale,  
[The wind came in your favour] Each day came in my favour just as I told the  
tale,  
The eighth day [that] we were at sea our anchors we let run;  
In a pleasant harbour in a place called Smokey Run.

10. So now my song is ended I have no more to say,  
Our freight there is all landed and our anchors we must weigh!  
We'll hoist up our big mainsail and it's down the shore we'll run,  
May the heavens smile on [those] all the girls we left in Smokey Run.<sup>117</sup>

Pad Cole learned his version from his grandmother Kenny. It was composed by  
three or four people on the way to Labrador, including Kate Foley.

In contrast to the preceding lighted-hearted story and song, there are stories of  
skippers fiercely protecting the women who came on the Labrador with them and of  
women being fearful of men on the passage and on the Labrador who were "after them".  
My father Jim Doyle claimed that the main reason men made overtures to women was  
that this gave them opportunity to share their berths; "That's all that it actually was, a  
place to lay your head."<sup>118</sup> Songs and stories documenting these shipboard romances

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<sup>117</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8686. For information on composers, see "The Big Three-Masted Schooner" earlier in this chapter.

<sup>118</sup> See MUNFLA, ms. , 84-220. The father-daughter relationship may have influenced his denial of sexual activity. However, he did tell me that he had girlfriends on the

contradict this claim, although it may have been true in some cases as women did have the more comfortable places to sleep, relatively speaking. In my own experience during fieldwork I was equally in danger from unwanted male attention in the presence of a protective male on two occasions on land and on my own for both the voyage down to and back from the Labrador

On a more serious note, in at least one legal case, the courting which took place on the passage and in Labrador was considered a major contributing factor to murder. Patrick Geehan and Joannah Hamilton, who was over six months pregnant, were found guilty of the murder of Patrick's brother-in-law, Garrett Sears.

Illicit intercourse rendered it necessary to get rid of Mrs. Geehan and her brother as the only obstacle to their criminal conduct. The evidence consisted of certain expressions dropped by Hamilton at Labrador the previous summer. We refer to the promiscuous mingling of the sexes on the Labrador coast during the summer fishery. We have animadverted upon this before, but as usual, without effect. The evil commences in the vessels which convey the fishermen to their destinations. The vessels have no proper accommodations for females. Men and women are huddled together in small vessels; what wonder the latter get corrupted - and the corruption commenced on the vessel is continued on land, where the huts are scarcely fit for the habitation of human beings. We only refer to the matter at present because we believe that every manner of common sense will observe that this diabolical murder is one of the natural consequences of the state of things on the Labrador coast, and because we believe that such an awful calamity will lead to something being done by the Government or the merchants to remove this stain upon our civilization.<sup>119</sup>

Typically, whenever I mentioned I was studying the folklore of the Labrador migratory fishery, acquaintances and strangers would have a story or two to tell me. For

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Labrador while courting my future mother. Likewise, my mother assured me she dated other men in the summer time.

<sup>119</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 7 June 1872.



example, one of the stories I did not have time to research was told to me by Pierre Berton who was lecturing at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) as guest of the MUN Folklore Society. I was asked to introduce him because both of us researched aspects of the Labrador fishery. Afterwards, over beer with students at the Ship Inn, a local pub, he told me his researcher had found Grenfell's accounts of the fishermen selling their wives' favours for hard-to-come-by cash on the trips to and from Labrador.<sup>120</sup>

The plight of women led to the passage of an "Act to Make Provision for the Better Accommodation of Female Passengers" on May 20th, 1882, better known as the "Labrador Passenger Act." This bill called for the provision of separate cabins or apartments which allowed for fifty cubic feet for each female, and sufficient accommodation for sanitary purposes.<sup>121</sup> That the bill was not strictly enforced becomes evident in the published summary of the Chief Justice's address to the Grand Jury after the October Gale of 1885 in which he "recommended that it [the Act] should be more stringently enforced."<sup>122</sup> It is also evident in the stories up to the 1970s when it finally became illegal to treat passengers as freight.<sup>123</sup>

Another type of story that was told to me as insider is the story of the mixed-up babies. These babies supposedly ended up with the wrong mothers in the darkness caused

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<sup>120</sup> Personal communication, 1986.

<sup>121</sup> PANL, G.N. 1/3A, #253, 49(1904).

<sup>122</sup> *Evening Telegram*, November 20, 1885, published in *Them Days* 11: 1 (1985): 23. I compiled the material for this issue out of my newspaper inventories.

<sup>123</sup> Field notebook 1, pp. 24-25. Passengers were often referred to as freighters, because they were transported like freight.

by battening down the hatches for long periods in stormy weather. In one case, a baby was supposed to have been taken to a community in Conception Bay and it was only when the mothers get home that they realized that they didn't have their own children. By the time they got back together again on the Labrador, they were so attached to the children that they didn't want to give them up. Regardless of whether this story is true or a modern urban legend, it emphasizes the dark, crowded ship's hold and the complete separation for some until the next fishing season.

### Neptune

Several of the informants mentioned briefly the custom of "King Neptune" coming aboard to mark the crossing of the straits for the first time. Hussey gives the following account of this particular version of a "crossing the line"<sup>124</sup> ceremony:

Any young man who was travelling across the Strait of Belle Isle for the first time was in for much teasing that Neptune, god of the seas, was supposed to come on board from the depths of the ocean and shave the newcomer or so the oldtimers were used to saying. Many a young man believed this and was a bit apprehensive while crossing the straits. Once or twice, "Neptune" came up over the side with oilskins dripping and a mop in his hand. The newcomers really thought that they were in for a shaving but they soon learned that it was only meant as a bit of harmless fun.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> For a discussion of Father Neptune and Newfoundland sealers see John R. Scott, "The Function of Folklore in the Interrelationship of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery and the Home Communities of the Sealers," MA Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1974, pp. 161-163. For a survey of the international tradition, see Horace Beck, *Folklore of the Sea*, American Maritime Library, No. 6 (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan UP, 1973), pp. 116-119.

<sup>125</sup> Hussey, p. 8.



A crew member aboard the *Taverner* recalled that a similar custom was used in recent years to entertain passengers travelling to the Labrador.

Years ago on the old *Cabot Strait* and those and the *Nonia* and the *Bar Haven* and the *Springdale* - old type, we used to have Neptune crossing the Strait of Belle Isle. From Newfoundland to Labrador we used to have Neptune. And it was a tradition. We used to have a saloon, a dining area, so we would have all the people in there all locked in behind the doors. Then the Captain generally comes in. And we would have coming from the gallery doors we would have Neptune and two helpers all dressed in oilskins, rags, whatever they could find.

They would come on in. And the people are quite shocked. They don't know what was going on. They would think they were down for some sort of ship meeting. And when they see three guys running out with oilskins, face all buried in, they get quite panicky until they realize that it's all one big joke. And then they go along with it. They get painted with chocolate. You get one or two who don't want to take part. You take the majority of passengers all want to take. Chocolate. (C.M. Some people have it done with shoe polish.) I never heard tell of that. Crew members that tell that. It never happened when I was on the boat. We always did it with chocolate something that easy to wash or come away. (C.M. Was it done to you?) Oh, yes. It was done to me every time we do this Neptune bit. (C.M. Why?) Basically we like to get one of the crew members involved that was serving passengers. That way the passengers knew what's going on and it's all fun. So then they don't mind getting it done. Then they practically beg to get it done. They want to have pictures of the wives getting painted and the husbands getting painted. The wives taking pictures when it's all done. Something to remember something that they enjoyed. We try to make the trip quite pleasant for everybody. (C.M. So this is not done on a night when it is rough crossing the strait?) No, it's only on calm weather. (C.M. Do you wait until you are out a certain distance?) We wait until night because it puts your mystery into it. (C.M. Was this back in the days when you used to have parties on the ship with guitars going and everything?) Yes, it basically turns into a party because it's relaxation and enjoyment for the passengers at these times. Back 1968, 69, 70. (C.M. Who came up with this idea?) Basically all the crew members. Only for that it would never be done. (C.M. You've got to have a skipper and crew to go along with it?) Yes. (C.M. What was the origin?) Ancient times I would presume. Neptune, the equator. This is where it originated from. When you are crossing from south to west of the equator, they have Neptune the old man from the sea who comes aboard to welcome you into the next dimensions. (C.M. Was someone down there and brought back the custom?) I don't know. Newfoundlanders have been sailing all over the world. What customs were picked up foreign to us has all been brought back to Newfoundland. (C.M. Apart from that, was anything done to new crew members to make them part of the team?) Yes, if there was someone new,



then they would get the going-over. (C.M. What other kind of tricks did you play on crew members?) Basically that was about it. (C.M. Are you sure? I've been given a hint there were other things.) Probably there is but I wouldn't want to go into it [with a girl]. Just practical jokes--nothing that would hurt anybody. A ship is no place to frolic... Frenched their beds a lot... Apple pie... Somebody new comes aboard we send 'em down for a bucket of steam for the hot water. Sometimes they fall for it or they get half way down the engine room and realize it was a joke played on 'em... eggs in the bottom of the bed, little bit of grease, odds and ends so they slide in easier. Make beds really tight. Someone you were assigned to, you would tight up the bed so when they get in at night, they would have a job and a half - tucking in really tight. ...Don't play any trick on the captain because he can play one trick on you [fire you].<sup>126</sup>

## Summary

This chapter has built a composite account of going in collar and the passage to the Labrador. The preparations for the trip marked the beginning of the process of separation from home, family, and community life. The voyage itself constituted the act of separation. The "freighters" (passengers) formed new groups for the duration of the trip which provided opportunities for initiating newcomers and for developing their own sense of group identity through the exchange of songs and stories, and for justifying their continual participation in the Labrador fishery. The voyage was the last opportunity for large group interaction until the fishing stopped in mid-August. The lore and traditions of the passage to Labrador are analogous to the processes of separation and displacement of normal community structure. In hazardous situations and in close quarters, people - who under normal circumstances might be separated by religion, class, and gender - had to pull together for the good of all. A common theme was that "we were all in this together" and therefore, "freighters" had to be living insurance for each other against natural and

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<sup>126</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8672.

man-made disasters aboard ship. These social networks continued on the Labrador despite further changes in group structure. The next chapter documents the work aspect of the Labrador fishery and Chapter Five will document the social activities of leisure time on the Labrador.

## CHAPTER 4

### ON THE LABRADOR

Of the three to four months spent on the Labrador, the cod fishing season was a highly labour-intensive period which lasted a brief four to six weeks. The rest of the time was spent preparing the fish for market. This chapter deals with the activities involved directly with the fishery and the subsequent occupational interactions between groups that shared work space. A composite picture of folk life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Labrador Straits area, the oldest fishing grounds of Newfoundlanders, is given to provide a framework for the interaction between Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Information about the Labrador Straits is available from published sources, newspaper accounts, and oral history tapes in the *Them Days* Labrador Archive (TDLA), MUNFLA, the Maritime History Archive (MHA), and the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The formal history of the Labrador Straits has been documented in published sources: the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume I*, Lawrence Jackson's *Bounty of a Barren Coast: Resource Harvest and Settlement in Southern Labrador Phase One* (1982), Albert S. Whiteley's *A Century at Bonne Esperance: The Saga of the Whiteley Family*, and Browne's *Where The Fishers Go: The Story of the Labrador Fishery*.

The Newfoundland newspapers of the 1800s contain a wealth of information about the Labrador fishery. Articles, usually headlined "From the Straits," dealt with the fishery and with life in general in the area. A chronological listing of these accounts has



been compiled for deposit in MUNFLA. Even in abbreviated form they make for interesting reading.

The Labrador fishery was considered a newsworthy item every year from May to October. It received extra coverage in 1885, the year of the October Gale. That story, along with coverage typical of other years, was compiled and published in Volume 11, number 1 of *Them Days*. This publication, produced by *Them Days* Labrador Archives and Publications (TDLA), provides an opportunity for these fishing families, most of whom originated in Newfoundland, to record their own history and communicate it to other Labradorians and Newfoundlanders.

Each subsection of this chapter begins with the history of the fishermen in the Labrador Straits between 1804 and 1988, as verbalized by them and their families and recorded in accounts deposited in TDLA, in MUNFLA, and in MHA. The first section gives examples of the topics and themes about which the fishing families of the Labrador Straits and Newfoundland have talked or written.

### **The Fishery in the Nineteenth Century**

Documents relating to the Labrador Straits have tended to focus on the fishery itself and they continue to do so. Letters and reports from 1773-1820, located in MHA, give statistics on the cod, whale, and seal fisheries including merchants' and agents' names, the number of people employed and complaints of American interference with the British fishermen. Instances of Anglo-American conflict, in fact, are fairly common. The Americans were blamed for starting a fire in Blanc Sablon in 1803 which spread almost to Bay of Forts. They were also blamed for the yearly practice of enticing and carrying

away the servants and fishermen, and for ignoring the local method of disposing of gurry (fish offal) and dumping it where it suited them. A letter from Lieutenant J.H. Morrison to Vice Admiral Gower dated 13 September 1804 stated that the English fishermen at L'Anse au Loup had placed four guns at the entrance of the bay to keep the Americans out in consequence of their having set fire to the woods and otherwise having annoyed the English fishery.<sup>127</sup>

The following year, Captain Northey stated that the British themselves were often the aggressors and this he firmly believed "to proceed from the jealousy of the Americans who are certainly much more expert and indefatigable than the British."<sup>128</sup> Northey contended that the fire, like a similar one in Newfoundland, was caused by the extreme heat of the atmosphere. He also stated that the Americans had ten to fifteen times as many boats on the fishing grounds and that they fished on Sunday, contrary to English practice. More importantly, the letter stated that Northey had, in more than one instance, been requested by the British to "refrain from interfering and using threatening language to the Americans," giving for reasons "we are all good friends." "And, no doubt," wrote Northey, "but they understand each other."<sup>129</sup>

The prevailing complaint was that of throwing the gurry (offal) overboard. The newspaper and archival accounts demonstrate the fishermen's interest in conserving the fishing grounds. With regards to having more boats and fishing on Sundays, while that

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<sup>127</sup> Letters pertaining to the Labrador 1773-1820, Admiralty in letters, Admiralty 1/470 - 1/475, MHA, 15-D-8-9, photocopies.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

might have expedited the harvesting of fish, it also depleted the stock quickly and exhausted the fishermen. An 1867 account from Indian Harbour<sup>130</sup> shows that the observance of Sunday as a day of worship was, and is, a time-honoured custom.

### **The Fishery in the Twentieth Century**

Personal experience narratives published in *Them Days* magazines contain similar information to the above official accounts, in that they both show a concern for wages, quotas, prices, and the number and nationality of vessels on the fishing ground. Here, as in Newfoundland, it becomes clear that many men began their fishing careers between the ages of nine and twelve. Jim Linstead, born in 1895, began fishing at age five “for a scatter day.”<sup>131</sup> Preston Fowler, who began fishing at age twelve, recalls the schooners coming from the west coast of Newfoundland. He remembers that “not many married along the shore” and that “the fish was sold at Schooner Cove to a feller named Sharpe from Hant’s Harbour.”<sup>132</sup> Narratives of fishermen of the present century document the technological transition to gasoline boats and long liners, giving the bad and the good points. For the most part, costs, the fluctuating prices of fish and wages, and diminishing cod stocks are the central subjects. In 1888, John Normore shipped to Job Brothers’ room at L’Anse au Loup for \$92.00, minus fifty cents towards a medicine chest, but including an allowance per week of seven pounds of bread, three of flour, four of pork, one pound

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<sup>130</sup> Commander W. Chimmo, *Journal of a Voyage to Labrador in H.M.S. Gannet, 1867*, pp. 33-34 (Centre for Newfoundland Studies) OMF-40.

<sup>131</sup> *Them Days* 6:1 (1980), pp. 52-53.

<sup>132</sup> *Them Days* 6:1 (1980), p. 53.



of butter, a quarter pound of molasses, and a quarter pound of tea.<sup>133</sup> Pat O'Brien worked at the Job Brothers' whale factory in Schooner Cove (L'Anse au Loup) for ten cents an hour, sometimes twelve.<sup>134</sup> Other fishermen told of spending eleven days building a six foot motor boat for \$12.00. Arthur Ryland described the different types of fishing - hand line, trapping and trawling - and gave his opinion of why the better fish is that caught in a trawl. "Fish drown in a gill net and quickly become soft."<sup>135</sup> Jack Buckle, who started fishing at Buckle's Point at age twelve, notes that the Newfoundland planters (fishermen with premises on the shore) who came from Hants Harbour and New Chesley "had no more than what we did for fishing."<sup>136</sup>

In 1977, George Buckle noted:

They have everything they need for fishing and now there's no fish. It's not easy to look out in the morning and see no boats. I think the fishery was ruined when the draggers came here. They own the fishery now, the draggers do.<sup>137</sup>

Mr. Ryland summed up the fishermen's predicament well when he said: "If only we had fish according to the price, there'd be some money made."<sup>138</sup>

Although work life was neither easy nor lucrative, it had its lighter moments.

Victor Fowler tells a story about his grandfather, John Fowler, teasing his shareman from Trinity Bay that he would have his share of fish jigged before the shareman untangled his

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<sup>133</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 19 November 1888.

<sup>134</sup> *Them Days* 7:1 (1981), p. 50.

<sup>135</sup> *Them Days* 3: 4 (1978), pp. 6-7.

<sup>136</sup> *Them Days* 10:4 (1985), p. 47.

<sup>137</sup> *Them Days* 2:4 (1977), p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Them Days* 3:4 (1978), p. 7.

lines. But, as it would happen, the shareman got his quota in first. "Ah ha, Mr. Fowler," said the shareman, "Don't take too much to make a man talk, do it. - They then shared a meal from the same pot as was the custom while out fishing. The best food was on the shareman's side. Mr. Fowler didn't want to ask for some. In the ruse of admiring the pot, for which he had paid \$2.00, he turned the pot around to himself. The shareman quickly turned it back saying: "It was worth every penny of it!"<sup>139</sup>

### **Work Rounds**

In a lengthy interview, Captain Matt Whelan of Colliers provides an overview of the work involved in fishing on the Labrador. His comments illustrate the activity during the fishing season.

[I was] seventeen when I first went to the Labrador. 1934 or 1935. Only went two years. No money to be made anyway; it was the Depression years. Labrador trapping crew - five men. First year - good summer. Last year fish was cured on the Labrador. After that it was sold out of salt bulk. Crew cleared \$14.50 each. That's a small cheque for the whole summer's work. The skipper wanted to curse but he had a word he used to say. Skipper said "My jeepers, you shouldn't complain. You have two quintals of winter fish. \$2.50 a quintal. Enough to keep a family going all winter in fish." [That was] skipper Matt Whelan, Frankie's father. By the wharf. The next year we sold it salt bulk. We had a fair catch but prices was worse, price \$10.50 for 150 lbs. Had to give 150 lb quintal. Only paid our accounts but made nothing. Same skipper but different crew. Pad Whelan, Master Lar's nephew, went to the States. Two or three different crew members, all from Colliers. Labrador fishery was interesting. I liked it. I didn't give it up because I didn't like the job. I used to like spending the summer on the Labrador. The weather was nice. Put in a lot of time but the work wasn't hard. Spare time - bad weather.

Went down on the *Kyle*. Worked in stage head. Secured everything for the \_\_\_\_\_? 25 or 30 crews. Everything was loaded aboard, all the supplies for the summer. Ten days on the way down picking up crews from Conception,

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<sup>139</sup> *Them Days* 6:1 (1980), p. 63.



Bonavista, Trinity Bay, then drop off crews on the Labrador. The first thing we had to do when we got down there, and that was to open up the bunkhouse and to put the stage head out. After setting up fishing gear, first thing we had to do was get a load of wood. There was no wood out around the islands where the fishermen set up. You had to go up in a place called Pottles Bay. That was a day's work. Then you'd go and get a load of salt. Get the fishing gear in the water. Get trap out. Everything was go then as hard as you could go for about 6 weeks until the trap season was over. Store fish away even if it were midnight. It would spoil if you left it all night. The girl would help.

After six weeks, trapping season was done. Had to wash the fish, take it out and salt bulk or wash out in tubs on the stage. The water drawn up in buckets over stage head - a man's job to draw water. Wash fish, carry fish in, salt it, bring back the barrow again, keep going back and forth. Drawing water, washing fish, carry it in the sun. When the fish was all washed out, it was bulked on the stage. Leave it there for a week or two - two weeks. The same as it had been in salt bulk. They called that water horse. Let it set, then start to dry it. It was spread out on the bawn. Each batch of fish took a couple of days, two to three days if you get the right weather. It was made up. There was really a science to curing fish on the Labrador that the older people knew but we didn't know now because we weren't there long enough to learn it. The older people had it down fine. Even when it was being cured on the bawn... They could take the fish up and look at it and tell if it were finished, if it had to be spread again or pressed for another night. When the fish was all cured, start to ship it. Usually a steamer come down. If there was no steamer down you could carry it to the merchant and store it in his warehouse there. Merchant in that area was Hiscock in Smokey. Jerrets was there too but gave up. When the steamer was there you went alongside and took your turn, slow work. Three to four thousand tonne. She was light and empty, ship high up. The first time we went there to load, there was two scaffolds on the ship's side. You'd yaffle the fish [load your arms with fish] and throw it up to the men on the first scaffold. He throw it to the man on another scaffold and then it was thrown up to the man on deck who'd throw it in the hole. There would be not one fish left. That took a fair bit of time to learn. Had to practice that before you could do it right.

Then when all the fish were loaded, everything cleared out, get ready for home. You may have to wait a week, two weeks for a mail boat to come round again. There were still a few bankers there in the thirties. If we had any spare time we'd go up there or up around the high hill on the island. You could see them [the bankers] on the outside going up and down. They had no power - all salls.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.



## Women's Role in the Folklife of the Labrador Fishery

Captain Matt Whelan also offered this comment on the role of women in the Labrador fishery.

I think the girls on the Labrador worked harder than the men. Had day's work, had to cook, wash, they even cut wood. When she had spare time she'd come down to help with the stage.<sup>141</sup>

At least as far back as 1809 women were working at the fishery.<sup>142</sup> In that year, Johanna Buckle was employed as a washerwoman by James Belbin.<sup>143</sup> Women's wages were never very high. Miss Emma Walsh shipped to the Labrador as a fishery servant for \$32.00 for the summer of 1888.<sup>144</sup> Ethel Yetman of Red Bay, Labrador recalls shipping out to Forteau from March until October for fifteen dollars. When she married and moved to Red Bay, there were eight fishing crews and plenty of fish - between one hundred and four hundred quintals per crew was considered a good haul. Women washed and spread the fish to dry, day in and day out, when it was fine. "That was a day's work, we didn't do much work in the house (when we were at the fish)."<sup>145</sup> Mrs. Yetman described making bread using hops and barm of molasses dough.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> For Newfoundland examples, see Murray.

<sup>143</sup> Labrador Surrogate Court 1810-1811, MHA, 17-D-9-2, photocopy.

<sup>144</sup> Central District Court, *Evening Telegram*, 21 December 1888.

<sup>145</sup> *Them Days*, 5:3 (1980), p. 29.

<sup>146</sup> Barm is a mixture of yeast and flour added to dough to induce rising, Story, et al.

Mary Jane Jones, born in L'Anse au Clair in 1898, went teaching at the age of fourteen in a small school at Capstan Island "for three months for the handsome sum of fifty dollars. I was so proud to be earning on my own and to be a teacher - just the name alone was rewarding." She taught for six years and later became a postmistress for thirty-nine years. In the years of the Depression she was paid \$13.00 a year.<sup>147</sup>

Fishing was not only men's work. Despite the traditional belief that women on board would jinx a trip, some women did fish in Labrador and Newfoundland. More often, they worked with the fish on shore. Before her marriage, Bessie Flynn always headed the fish but later she split the fish because her husband was left handed.<sup>148</sup> Mrs. Flynn recalled how everyone pitched in to carry in the fish if there was a shower of rain.

You'd see three-year-olds going off with a fish or two as big - at a time - almost as big as themselves. Every woman and child worked like a dog but we didn't mind the hard work. It was our way of life and we lived it.<sup>149</sup>

Isabelle Butt, of East Ste. Modeste and Pinware, used to bake bread for the crews of Newfoundlanders who came across the Straits of Belle Isle to stay most of the summer in old houses or camps. Sometimes she would bake as many as twenty loaves a day. The next summer they would bring her two or three laying hens and perhaps some fresh cow's butter.<sup>150</sup> Apart from helping the men with the codfish, the women also made hay,

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<sup>147</sup> *Them Days*, 1:3 (1976), p. 54.

<sup>148</sup> *Them Days*, 2:4 (1977), p. 7. Left-handed people could split fish if they used a left-handed splitting knife.

<sup>149</sup> *Them Days*, 6:1 (1980), p. 52.

<sup>150</sup> *Them Days*, 1:3 (1976), pp. 52-53.



hooked rugs for the Grenfell mission, picked berries, made clothes and snowshoes, took care of the sick and dealt with great personal tragedies.

Colliers women on the Labrador, like these down in the Straits and elsewhere in Newfoundland, played important roles in the fishing stations. Not only were they responsible for cooking and household chores, but they also took an active role in processing the fish from a young age, as is recalled by two of my informants.

Kitty (Phillips) McCarthy, a petite woman, who was born in 1897 and first went to the Labrador in 1912, described the routine of her first year on the Labrador as follows:

I was fifteen and they came for me to go to the Labrador and Aunt Fannie she said "You can go. You can take her." (I had) three bosses and still I could have neither one. I had a lovely time. I loved the Labrador. (The) passage going down and coming home was wonderful. We had the whole length of the big vessel and there they was with all the girls, bunks along the whole length of her. They was singing and we was all singing. We had a hell of a time, boy. Got down on the Labrador, down on the rocks. Oh, boy, what a place. It was some good, boy. They put me salting, tending the table. The first year was putting the fish through the puncheons up on the table for the men to open up the fish to split. Not splittin' the fish. We had two splitters. Here, beggar. I was all right. There was nothing wrong. I was lovely. Come home. Next year. Went down the next year. They put me saltin' the fish. Now that was a big puncheon of salt. I used to have to dip the little shovel down into the salt and put it up on the fin of the fish. I had a big ladder to get up on to get up on the bulk of the fish. It was the whole length of the stage. We had to put the salt upon the yen (fin) of the fish, dip down again, and put it up and that's how I salted the fish. I was first rate that summer. That was all right.<sup>151</sup>

Ann Grace was born in Colliers in 1904 and went to Labrador with Barry Trahey at first, and then with Pad Wade for two or three years. She worked out of Splitting Knife and the Run, Cut Throat Island. She had forgotten how old she was when she first went

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<sup>151</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8631.



and most names of the crew she had worked with, but she did remember the work she did.

We had to bring bed clothes and our own clothes, enough for the summer and wash it before you go back. If you didn't, when you get back [to Newfoundland], you had to go over to your boss's place and wash it. The skipper brought the food. I used to love to be on the stage with them cutting throats.<sup>152</sup>

Alice (Doyle) Kenny first went on the Labrador in 1920 with her father, brother, and uncle. She never liked the boat trip. "I get sick from the time I'd go until I get back (on land) .-Despite the seasickness she went for fifteen years between 1930 and 1945.

Sunday morning. Cook pot of brewis. Cook Sunday dinner. Sunday evening, cook little rounders<sup>153</sup> salted in the night time. Fish used to be nice. Had to carry everything: fat back, flour (three to four barrels), not like it is now, hard bread, butter. If they got short, they'd go to Hiscocks (in Smokey) and get it. No cows, no fresh milk, no canned milk then. They're just the same as here now. It would be black tea. Sometimes bring down a bag of potatoes when you had them left at home. There was lots of fish. One time (it was) a dollar fifty for a quintal of fish. Don't know the year. Me father was down there. You'd want to get a lot of fish. Now it's a dollar fifty a pound. Not as good as it used to be because of the stuff (pollution) in the water. Used to be lots of salmon too... That's the place the bakeapples used to be at Splitting Knife on the hill. Little crock now eight dollars. Most everyday I had to make bread. You knew the kind of yeast that was going then. Get up in the morning and mix it (bread). You'd have to go make (the yeast), mix it, put it in the bowl before going to bed. T'was slow yeast. Four to five barrels of flour, two hundred pound barrels. Jim (your father) knows all about the barrels. Bake nine to ten loaves to eat coming home on the boat. ... (The men) cut the wood. I wasn't cutting it. Water was handy. (You'd) see the lads from the schooners coming in to get theirs. Lots of company. I liked it there. Not much difference in the work (from that at home). You'd have to get (the) washing board, scrubbing board to go washing (the clothes)... No knitting.

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<sup>152</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8684.

<sup>153</sup> A small cod fish gutted, headed, salted and dried without being split.

A common theme was "All you would want down on the Labrador was a good cook." Tom Doyle listed the supplies brought along for the cook: a two hundred pound barrel of fat back, barrel of beef, five barrels of flour, a sack of peas, a sack of beans, a tub of butter, three tubs of sugar, molasses, some raisins, and potatoes. "Good eating, nothing like it."<sup>154</sup> Alice (Doyle) McGrath recalled cooking cabbage and greens from their cabbage garden on the Labrador.<sup>155</sup>

Some cooks were known to have "sour fingers," which meant that whatever they tried to cook would spoil. One narrative tells of a young cook who took the skipper's words too literally. It is told by Kitty (Phillips) McCarthy, who as mentioned previously was born in 1897 and first went to the Labrador in 1912.<sup>156</sup>

Poor Mary Ann Phillips, my sister, was in Spitting Knife... [The Ghaney's had their room] not far from me sister. Went over there every Sunday evening, the crowd of us to Smokey Run. Lots of people there from Conception Harbour, the Kennys, Uncle Davey Kenny. He had a girl with him. She said, "Uncle Dave, what's I going to get you for dinner?" T'is a Monday morning. "Ah," he said, there's some old guts, heads and soundbones down under the stage we got Friday evening. Get some of that and cook it." Davey Kenny, he was a hard case. Mickey Mahoney was with him, poor Paddy Burke from down [Colliers] harbour he was with him. He was nice. Out goes Mary Ellen and gets the stuff, the old soundbones and all and had it cooked when they come. Poor Mickey Mahoney, when she took the stuff up on the plate, he took the plate and fired it through the door. Plate and all. "There", he said, "pay for that plate." Over come the whole crew over to the house to see what I had for dinner. A whole crew of them. "Go get it", says old Nick [Ghaney] and hand it on to these men." Pudding, pork, stuff, whatever I had left, I used to hash that up the next day and give it to them. "Go

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<sup>154</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8678.

<sup>155</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.

<sup>156</sup> Her mother Sybil Anthony of North River, Conception Bay had also gone on the Labrador after her teaching term ended in May. Kitty's father was Ned Phillips, the brother of the strongman, Joby Phillips, whose feats are discussed in the following chapter.



get it," he says. I went and brought it out and put it on the table. He said, "If I had a girl," old Nick said, "like that, I'd fire her in the water." "It wasn't her fault," I said, "Mr. Ghaney". It was [though] to cook [that]. She ought to know better [than] to get the fish that was brought in and headed Friday evening to cook on Sunday evening or Monday evening and that's the truth as you're there. I'm telling no lies. "Well," he said, "if you done that what would you do?" "You needn't worry, Mr. Ghaney, I ['m] not going to do any such thing." Poor! There were some bad girls on the Labrador, bad cooks. Make the bread. You'd see Mary Ellen going right up on the hill with a bag of stuff flinging it away, heaving it away. [They'd] waste an awful lot of grub.

My maternal grandmother, Elizabeth (Ryan) Griffin, was born in Colliers and went to Splitting Knife on Cut Throat Island in 1883 at the age of ten. She went as cook for eight men, including her uncles John, Mike, and Paddy Ryan. When I asked my mother, Catherine (Griffin) Doyle, and aunt, Nell (Griffin) Stoyles, to tell me what she had told them about going down on the Labrador, they told me the following story interspersed with other memories of growing up in the Griffin household:

N.S.: She was splitting fish on the stage one night and the bone went through her hand. Anyway, she showed me the mark. I remember her.

C.D.: She told us how she had to cook and bake bread with hangers. I seen that sure up in Toronto. [Black Creek Pioneer Village]

N.S.: Wire racks, you mean?

C.D.: She used to get the coals and put the coals up around her bread. The boilers used to have a machine, a wire, a piece of steel to hang 'em. Alice and them [James Doyle's sister] used to have a fireplace like that years ago.

N.S.: This was built up on an iron rod. No stove. She worked hard. They had a place to sleep, that's all. I remember Mom telling me how she used to work hard. She had to work. That's all I remember.

C.D.: Wash for all the men, bake, go in on the stage.

N.S.: Seventeen when she got married. No, twenty-seven and Dad was twenty-six. Married in 1900 and she was twenty-seven. After Dad came home from the States.



C.D.: Had to be married before that because he wouldn't go out to the gold mines out west [Yukon] with Johnny Hearn. [Johnny] made a fortune. Dick [our brother], did he go with Greg Doyle?

N.S.: [He went with] Tom Doyle in Avondale, that's [also] who [our sister] Angela went with. He was looking for a girl all over. This day he was talking to Uncle Nickie Ghaney, Alice Phillips' father, and he said he was after being all over finding a girl to go to the Labrador. [Uncle Nickie Ghaney] said, "I'll tell you where to get a girl." Go in to Liz Griffin's, Liz they called her, and when they came in, she was milking the cow. I don't know if it was out there or there. And Angela was up on the fence watching her milking the cow. He told [Mom] what he was looking for. "Yes," Angela said. "No way," [Mom] said, "she's too young." Angela went two years [with Tom Doyle] and then she went with Bill Wade for a year. [She was] only fourteen....She told lots of stories but I can't remember them.<sup>157</sup>

They went on to talk about an uncle who supposedly had married a Labrador woman and settled in Labrador. This narrative is important in that it shows how the community and the family together preserve the family history. Great Uncle Richard was married in White Bay and one of his daughters was a nun, according to a neighbour.<sup>158</sup>

C.D.: Uncle Richard, Dad's brother, was on the Labrador.

N.S.: He came home after being on the Labrador. He crucified me poor mother cleaning the dirt. She used to have to get the scrubbing brush to clean the dirt and the oil off his clothes. Then he left and went up to Tommy Philips and said everything about me Dad and her. And the needle going right through her hand. She had to get the pliers to get it out.

C.D.: She was scrubbing clothes on the board and he had needles and thread in his pocket.

N.S.: Went fishing on the Labrador and married a Labrador woman. [Uncle Richard] had children because the son sent a letter to say how he went back and

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<sup>157</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8683.

<sup>158</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8689.

how good [Pop] was to him. Poor Pop bought new clothes and everything to him. Before [he] went to the Labrador.<sup>159</sup>

Both Nell and Catherine went on to discuss why neither had gone on the Labrador. Catherine Doyle confirmed that neither had been asked but she could have gone with her husband if she had not been sick in 1944. Her reference to her "one chance" and her belief that, although she was a good cook, she couldn't cook well enough to go on the Labrador suggests that there was a status to such a position which was lacking at home.

N.S.: I supposed no one asked me (to go to the Labrador).

C.D.: I had one chance to go to the Labrador. That was the year I got married but I wasn't so well then. Labrador was a bad place to go if you had rheumatism or anything. But I didn't think I could cook good enough. Couldn't get a girl anywhere and they took Uncle Fred McGrath. Uncle Fred got sick. Boils or something. Good cook but if I had to go, he (Jim) would have showed me. Nobody asked me or Nell. ...Not the year I got married, the next year (1944). They always had Alice and Bess Doyle. Alice (McGrath) down one summer with Ned Trahey. She split her side open with the washing tub coming in through the door and had to come home.<sup>160</sup>

A major role of women within the fishery was cooking, but in fishing families, the care of children would also be part of their duties. As seen in Chapter 3, some children were either taken to the Labrador or born there. Mrs. R. had been hired at the age of eleven as baby-sitter and assistant cook for one crew at a wage of \$10.00, while her

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<sup>159</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8683.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

mother went as cook for another crew<sup>161</sup>. Accounts have been given of using “sawed-off puncheons” (barrels) as playpens. As stated above, Mrs. Flynn recounted that three-year-olds would help carry in fish. No doubt everybody kept a collective eye on the children, as they do in most Newfoundland communities.

*Dites* were used to keep them out of danger.<sup>162</sup> The children were told that the “water man” who lived in the general area of the stage would get them if they went near the water when the men were not around.<sup>163</sup> The children also knew that in certain “drokes” there lived fairies who might spirit them away.<sup>164</sup>

There were no social services in these days and when a husband died the widow had the choice of putting her children in an orphanage or giving them to friends and relatives to raise while she went in service to earn her own keep. Gert Hawco records the life history of Aunt Hannah (Honora) Hammond who was born in 1880 in the small community of L’Anse au Diable in the Labrador Straits, a community which was vacated during the resettlement program. At the age of twelve, Aunt Hannah went to work as a nursemaid for the twin children of Mrs. Thomas Wyatt, the lighthouse keeper’s wife. At age nineteen, she married John Lowe of West Ste. Modeste. He died eighteen years later, leaving her to raise several children. Aunt Hannah chose to leave her children with relatives while she worked for the Marconi operators at L’Anse au Mort. She also worked

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<sup>161</sup> MUNFLA 78-188, pp. 2-5.

<sup>162</sup> For examples of *dites*, see J. D. A. Widdowson, *If You Don’t Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland* (St. John’s, NF: ISER, 1977).

<sup>163</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 71-103, p. 14.

<sup>164</sup> Hussey, p. 18.



at Salmon Bay and Bonne Bay until she married again in 1920 and started to raise a second family.”<sup>165</sup> Martha MacDonald described her life as a widow with a daughter to support. She went out as a servant girl for \$5.00 per month to support her daughter and herself after her husband died in 1941. Two years later she received a welfare allowance of \$15.00 every three months. Later she went to work in Blanc Sablon for \$15.00 a month. She was in service rest of her life, travelling as far as Hopedale to augment her income.<sup>166</sup>

Cooking, children, laundry, and helping with the fish would be the main activities during the summer fishery. However, there was also time for household chores that normally took place during the winter but could also contribute to the family economy.

Mrs. B. of Carbonear, Conception Bay, born in 1897, spent twenty-seven summers on the Labrador at Square Island. She spent winters at home doing the family chores and knitting nets. In the summer on the Labrador, she would hook mats when she was freed from other duties.

Many times they would receive news that the fish was better “up the shore” so fishermen would go away for several days at a time leaving the families in Square Island. On nights that the men were gone the women would get together for a mat hooking bee. Usually two or three women would gather together after the children were put to bed and work on the same mat. When a mat was finished they would start on another and in the end share up the mats.<sup>167</sup>

One winter, Mrs. B. exchanged eleven mats for eleven pairs of rubber boots.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Them Days* 2:3 (1977), pp. 8-10.

<sup>166</sup> *Them Days*, 2:3 (1977): 7.

<sup>167</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 80-091, p. 12.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

Although I did not find any archival accounts of Newfoundland women sewing grass I did observe the process during my stay at Tickeraluck Point with the two Rich families. Susan Rich, a Labradorian, was teaching the process to her daughter-in-law Marie and her daughters from a previous marriage all of whom were originally from Newfoundland. The following description of the process comes from Marie.

The seawater grass, which is found along the landwash, is picked and dried using a wire screen to hang it up indoors for about two to three days. Then it has to be kept in a cool dry place. Before using, the grass is dipped in water and rolled in a coil until it can be folded without being cracked. Some people washed it in soapy water (hard cake Sunlight soap) and greased it with butter or lard or any kind of grease (bacon fat) to keep the grass soft. Take three or four strands of grass and run it through your mouth to soften it, then tie it in a knot. Split the grass for sewing. Then tie it in a knot. Thread the needle with the split grass, bend it back, and sew in a coil [form a coil around the knot and carry on sewing in a circular motion] Start with a coil: three or four strands of grass tied in a knot. The grass has to be licked before it is cut or the sharp edges (splinters) will cut the lips. The grass inside is called poke because it is poked in. When the grass starts to get thin, it is poked in. You start with an oval beginning, poke it through, then go around and around.<sup>169</sup>

Susan used to teach a six-week life skills program on sewing grass to the children in grades four and five in Rigolet. The technique is believed to have been brought from Alaska by an old Inuit woman.

Grasswork was being sold in 1984 by the inch, a dollar an inch, up to twelve inches. After twelve inches it is two dollars an inch. George Rich, Susan's husband, had made a doll's cradle of grass. Janice, Marie's daughter, had made a tea cup and, unlike most of Susan's students, she liked to sew in the summer. Susan has made three baskets and George made a gun bag which was part of an international exhibit in spring of 1985.

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<sup>169</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8674.



The gun bag, which was sold for one hundred fifty dollars, was resold in New York for one thousand dollars. George told me that

back in the old days, the [Grenfell] mission would send in empty barrels and people would sew grass to fill the barrels. In exchange they received a barrel full of second-hand clothes which hardly ever fit until they were cut over or cut down.<sup>170</sup>

### Occupational Hazards

Elizabeth Ryan was not the only Colliers woman to be injured because of the Labrador. Alice (Doyle) McGrath, despite her father's objections, went on the Labrador for one summer as cook. One Saturday night in September, while carrying in the washtub, she "tore up her side" and had to be sent home on the *Kyle*. She was paid sixty dollars and given a new plaid coat for her summer's work.<sup>171</sup> Occasionally, even minor injuries, if not treated properly, could lead to serious complications. Kitty McCarthy recalled the following incident that occurred during her third and last summer on the Labrador.

They put me headin', you knew what that is .putting your hands down in the fish and tearing the heads off 'em. Pull it right off. I drove a bone in it. My God! I never put in such a time in me life. Used to have puncheons for putting the livers in. Beggar, they took that up and put it on me finger. That was all right. I used to be up. I was two weeks with the finger going around the place all night long. I couldn't sleep. It turned blood poison. Here, beggar, they went to work and he put it down and poisoned the finger altogether. The next thing they had to do was take me up to Injun (Indian) Harbour Hospital. Only one doctor and one nurse. There was natives of Labrador, Huskimos (Eskimos), whole lot there in the one hospital.

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<sup>170</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8674. Sarah Baikie of Rigolet, Labrador, demonstrated the grass sewing technique at the Fifteenth Annual Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival, August 1991. She and I prepared a poster display, "Grass Sewing in Rigolet, Labrador," to accompany the demonstration.

<sup>171</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.



That's where they all had to go. The nurse usen't have time for anything. My sister was down with another man, Flynn from Conception Harbour, and I went up and get in bed with her and, just as I get to sleep, two o'clock in the morning, up they comes and tells me to get up and come down. They was going to the traps. I get up. I had to go down to the house, few steps away.

Pain. Me finger was swelled up as big as a water glass. All swelled up. Alright, beggar, he said, go up to the hospital. I went up and they operated and took it off (part of the finger) in the morning. I had wonderful flesh to heal. Whatever he opened up in the morning be'll flestered up. He had to drive the pliers in through and open it up again. This morning he said to me, "Look, if you don't stay still, I'll open it up and I'll dress it up again and undress it again." "Look here, Doctor Paddon." I knew his name as well as it was yesterday. "Look here, Doctor Paddon. That's nothing wrong with this hand. If you ever go to work to undress that again. That hand I'll give it to you night in the two eyes. That's what I'll do to you." He said, "*You* wouldn't do that." "Oh, indeed I would." That passed all right. He didn't open it.

Nurse came in....the day I had it off. I didn't know if it was the little finger on the one next to it I had off. There was more pain in the little one. I said to the nurse I couldn't sleep. She undressed it and showed me which one was gone.

I stayed home that winter. Go here and there [in service]. Come for me again the next spring. That was the fourth summer. Beggar, me father wouldn't let me go and I cried. He said, "You can cry but you're not going with that arm. If you goes, you can lose your arm along with the finger."

I used to have to head for Jack Ghaney and old Mick and Ben. I had three bosses. When I get home, they were saying, they all went around saying they wasn't going to give me any wages. Told me not to worry. They couldn't keep your wages from you.<sup>172</sup>

The loss of a finger might not have been the only reason Kitty (Phillips)

McCarthy was not allowed to return to Labrador. The following is a narrative of how she

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<sup>172</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8631.

was unfairly chastised by Dr. Paddon and may even have been barred from returning to the Labrador:

I had a wonderful time one time on the Labrador. Down on the back of the hospital. Now my mother was an Anthony from North River - there was three sisters and a brother. Aunty Sarah Hall, me father's sister, lived in North River. Now my sister and I walked down there to North River and stayed all night and walked back in the morn. No cars.

This fella' came along on a wrecked ship - shipwrecked in Injun Harbour. He was there all night. I didn't know him. He get up on the bench - big bench on the back of that. The two of us got up there talking. We got up there talking and he was telling me about the songs he knew and I was telling him about the songs I knew. This little friggin' Injun come along and told the doctor and he came out and drove us in. Now he was my first cousin. He was Aunt Emma's son. Frost, he was.

"We was doing no harm or nothing," he said to the doctor. He [the Doctor] said, "Get in," and he never let me out after. [We] weren't allowed alone with men. None of them.

Louisa, a Labradorian, was pregnant from another man. She had to leave. He [Doctor Paddon] was afraid of the people. He asked me, "What's your priest's name home?" "Monsignor Veitch is my priest." He even sent home and told the priest [that I was with a man]. When I came home poor Ellen O'Toole, Aunt Beth's daughter, she must have been over to confession over somewhere. Anyway he told her to tell me to go over. He wanted to see me. "I knows," I said, "what he wants to see me about and I have nothing to tell." That's what I done wrong. Why then, I had a right to go but I had nothing to tell him only [that I was] talking to me first cousin that I never seed before. That's all I had to tell. "All right, beggar," she said, "you'd better go over." I said, "All right, I'll manage all that. Don't worry." And she never stopped tormenting about going over to the priest and he was going to come over. I hope he will! I pray he will come over! He didn't come though and I didn't go over like a fool. I had a right to go and tell him the whole ins and outs of it. That was what I had a right to do.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid. For a history of the Indian Harbour hospital from 1894 to 1929, see Judy McGrath, "Feature: Indian Harbour Hospital," *Them Days* 4. 1 (1978), 4-41.



Another description of available medical facilities was given by Captain Matt Whelan.

There was little hospital, kind of nursing station, doctor, couple of nurses, one English nurse. We had to take one or two of the crew there a couple of times. Mostly toothache, stomach trouble. One feller had ulcers. We had to take him up there in a motor boat. It wasn't too far. Eight to ten miles away. Maybe less.<sup>174</sup>

Mr. S. of Spaniard's Bay swallowed a bone one summer and went eight days without eating before his crew tracked down a doctor. That same summer his wife took pneumonia and pleurisy, and his son "cut his hand nearly off with a splitting knife." After recounting this he said:

We had a bad summer, not very good luck. After we get fixed up we came out of it all right. No one never died and that's what happened to that.<sup>175</sup>

Institutional medicine was not the only type practiced. This is a story told by Margaret Davis of her grandmother, the Sandwich Bay Nurse.

Years ago hundreds of schooners would come from Newfoundland. One particular summer one of the fishermen got a badly infected hand. They heard about Grandmother Sheppard, of course, so he was brought to her. She operated on him. She made a cotton bag, sort of like a mitt, and told my mother to go and get several maggots to put in it. She put the bag with the maggots in it on his hand and left it on overnight. Next morning the hand was cleaned right out. In the meantime, Grandmother had steeped out some ground juniper bark and prepared a salve out of the pulpy part of the juniper. She mixed a bit of cod oil into her juniper salve. Next morning she bathed the hand in steeped juniper, applied some of her salve and dressed it. It wasn't long before the fisherman could go back to his schooner.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

<sup>175</sup> MUNFLA, ms. 76-456, pp. 27-31.

<sup>176</sup> Margaret Davis, *Them Days*, 2: 4 (1977), pg. 44.



## Conflict

This section contains narratives which examine the kinds of conflict encountered by fishermen prosecuting the annual migratory fishery. An examination of manuscripts on deposit in the MUNFLA revealed only scattered references to areas of conflict. It seemed rather amazing that upwards of 20,000 fisherfolk could converge on the Labrador coastline to compete for cod for four months and not be involved in more cases of conflict. Perhaps the fishermen had not talked of conflict because they had not been properly questioned, or maybe they glossed over the conflicts because they were constantly being exposed to dangers. The general impression given in the archival records is that "everybody was in this together." Therefore, differences of religion and ethnic backgrounds were left on the Newfoundland side of the Strait of Belle Isle. Given that the four months on the Labrador meant the difference between survival and starvation for the winter, this seems to be a reasonable assumption to make.

However, there was some conflict on the Labrador. The personal experience narratives in Chapter Three show that dangers could be expected from the weather, the land, the Inuit, the huskies, foreign fishermen, supernatural sources and other fishermen. Accounts of conflict have been noted in Reverend P. W. Browne's *Where the Fishers Go: The Story of Labrador*, Greta Hussey's *Our Life on Lear's Room*, and Nicholas Smith's *Fifty-Two Years on the Labrador*. Entries in the record book and diary of Magistrate E. J. Wornell confirm that there were conflicts which ranged from the petty to

the deadly.<sup>177</sup> This section summarizes the types and causes of conflict given in secondary sources and will then examine the extent to which they were present in the experiences of Jim Doyle, a man who spent seventeen summers on the Labrador.

One of the first things to be done on the Labrador was to mark the trap berth. Sometimes men came up early to mark the berths but usually they waited until the whole crew arrived. Once claimed, the berth was comparatively safe:

No-one else would touch that trap berth within the harbour. Everyone, it was a custom, a harbour rule, no one interfered with your berth. The only one that would, that could (which he never did) was a, like a newcomer. He could take a berth anywhere. But that's the way it was. You marked your berth you had the year before and the next man in the harbour. . .he marked his. No-one bothered anybody...<sup>178</sup>

The berths were generally allocated on a first-come first-serve basis, and once established they were usually respected. However, the owner's failure to mark his berth properly could result in a dispute. On Saturday, August 2, 1919, aboard the *SS Wren* Magistrate E. J. Wornell held an enquiry into a trap dispute.

The complainant Mr. S. Cooper came aboard and stated the case. Owing to not having put out a leader instead of an ordinary mark as specified in the Fishing Rules he lost the berth. Jacob Hale having set his Trap Leader according to Law claimed the berth.<sup>179</sup>

Other disputes over berths are also recorded in Wornell's papers. In a case heard July 30, 1926, a man who had removed a cod trap leader "contrary to law made and provided" had to give up the berth.<sup>180</sup> In a case heard August 20, 1926, gear had been set

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<sup>177</sup> Magistrate E. J. Wornell Collection, PANL P4/16.

<sup>178</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 76-314, pp. 7-8. I have not seen this privilege accorded to the newcomers anywhere else.

<sup>179</sup> Magistrate E. J. Wornell Collection, August 2, 1919, PANL P4/16.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, July 30, 1919.



too close together.<sup>181</sup> Wornell also had to deal with disputes over stolen goods and breaches of the game laws and hold inquiries into such matters as wrecked boats; assaults; accidental deaths and epidemics.<sup>182</sup>

Alcohol also provided the medium for a source of conflict. For example, the Inuit were not allowed by law to purchase liquor in the early years of this century nor were they allowed to receive a gift of liquor.<sup>183</sup> Doctor Grenfell had recognized the dangers of drinking among the Inuit and fishermen. In 1907, he started raids against *shebeens* (illicit liquor saloons). He also confiscated any supply of liquor he found. As magistrate he refused to give out any liquor licenses. It was his belief that more fishermen had been lost to drink than to Arctic storms. Not all victims were fishermen:

I buried in a lonely grave on a projecting promontory, far down the coast of Labrador, a young girl of eighteen. She was someone's daughter and someone's sister. I had taken her aboard our little hospital ship for the last week of her life. She should have been alive today, but she had no desire to live. All that could possibly make her life worth living for her was robbed from her through the means of alcohol, and she could not face the home-going again.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, August 20, 1919.

<sup>182</sup> While Wornell was travelling up and down the Labrador coast hearing court cases, the *SS Wren* was providing the residents of Labrador with some other valuable services. Freight, mail, and passengers were dropped off or collected up and down the coast. Weights were checked by a sergeant on board the *Wren*. Sick people were either treated on board or transferred to the *SS Sagona* or one of Grenfell's hospitals. A record was being kept of the location of vessels, the amount of fish they had and where they had obtained it, and fishermen came aboard to hear this news. No mention is made of the sergeant having dealings with the foreign vessels. However, an informant who served as custom officer on the *SS Sagona* from 1920 to 1929 had to "clear foreign going vessels with loads of dry fish for foreign markets." Most of his work was preventing the smuggling of liquor and other goods from Canada [MUNFLA, ms, 75-257, p. 22-23].

<sup>183</sup> James Johnston, *Grenfell on the Labrador* (London: S. W. Partridge, n.d.), p. 147.

<sup>184</sup> Johnston, p. 146.



It is unclear if the girl was impregnated by a drunk or was herself an alcoholic. However, Mr. R., a fisherman from Upper Island Cove, confirms that girls were exposed to such danger by saying that drinking on foreign vessels often "led to disagreements on even worse. Girls accompanying their families were usually locked in a room when drinking was going on."<sup>185</sup> Dr. Grenfell was opposed to women going on the Labrador with the men. Illicit romance on the Labrador led to at least one murder trial as recorded in the previous chapter.

In another drink-related accident, one of Mr. R.'s crew members was accused of stealing a watch while visiting on a foreign vessel. The sailors could not speak English, and for a while, a serious confrontation was anticipated; Mr. R.'s wife even believed she would never see them alive again. Fortunately, the watch was found and apologies were made.

Mr. R. said the Inuit treated them well, helping them unpack, setting up flakes and stages, and making slippers for them; however, they wanted everything they saw, particularly if it was red. Mr. R. said that they usually gave things to them at the end of the season. Although he gave no details, he did mention the possibility of conflict.

It was easy to hurt an Eskimo's feelings and they did not easily forget it if you did hurt them. So pains were taken not to offend them.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-400, p. 28 . This was at Batteau c. 1919.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

By contrast, some Labradorians were used as scapegoats by Newfoundlanders.

George, a Labradorian, tells this story from his grandfather's time about a schooner anchored in Black Island Tickle. The crew, followed later by the captain, left the schooner in the morning and rowed away to the trap.

So the crew came back before the skipper did and they found the cook lashed [tied] to the mast. They asked her what happened and she said there was a Labrador man came down the Tickle and came aboard. I don't know what he done with her but he lashed her to the mast he said. They used to have Justices of the Peace then who could have court but it was the magistrate they got for this case. Indian Harbour, which is about forty miles from this place, well that was where they were going to hold court to about this girl that was lashed. They went to all the places. They picked up the men, the magistrate did, and they came to Rocky Cove and there was quite a long [sand] bar there. They landed on the bar and was walking in. My grandfather Arthur went to the woodpile and get a stick and met them and drove them back. Wouldn't let them take any of his sons. So that's alright. They went again and everyone that was around fishing they lined them all up. They told the girl to pick out the one that lashed her. And there was one man there he could hardly get out a word for stuttering and I don't think he was too bright by what I heard, you know. He was one of these I don't know what you'd call it. He used to stutter a let. And she pointed to him. "This man! That's the man there if he's on earth!" Now this old man, he was quite an elderly man from what I hear, he took crying. He said, "No miss. Miss, I never seen the sky over you before. " He tried to say something else but before he get it out the magistrate made him shut up. That was enough. They took him out anyway. Took him out to St. John's. He was gone to St. John's. He was gone to St. John's. But in the end she confessed the skipper did it himself after the crew left.<sup>187</sup>

George went on to say that the Labrador man never brought any charges against the girl and never received any compensation for lost work time. George had a few of these negative stories about Newfoundlanders and the Newfoundland government in his

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<sup>187</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8621.

repertoire but mostly he and other Labradorians stressed the positive side, the caring and sharing.

Potential sources of conflict existed in merchant-fishermen relations. The life of the fishermen usually included bad summers and poor voyages. Eben Butt described the selling of fish in Red Bay and the setting up of accounts with the merchant. If the fishermen lost money, the merchant would say "Came up and get a cup of tea and we'll see what can be done about it." After talking about it, the merchant would tell the fishermen to take what they wanted on change and pay for it when they could. If they get a raise on the price of fish they could pay right then, but otherwise the change might have to go on until the next summer. Mr. Butt concluded that the merchant was "a good man to the fishermen."<sup>188</sup> In 1928 and 1929, however, the merchants refused to outfit fishermen for the summer voyage because of the poor market prices the previous years.

William Tracy recalls taking a man's part at fishing at age 12. In his time the price of fish went from \$1.25 quintal to \$4.00, and once, in 1919, to an all time high of \$8.00. He sold his fish to a Captain Reed from Nova Scotia, who would go as far as Fox Harbour to buy salmon. The year the war was on, Reed advised William's father to buy all the goods he had on board because the war would drive the prices up in the Fall.<sup>189</sup>

While most informants made little reference to the merchants, some feelings of resentment have been recorded. One fisherman lost nine hundred dollars. When he settled

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<sup>188</sup> *Them Days* 3:4 (1978), p. 41.

<sup>189</sup> *Them Days* 11:1 (1985), pp. 45-46.



up in the fall, he received a note for one-half gallon of molasses.<sup>190</sup> When he was asked if there was anything he could do about it, he answered:

No, nothing at all. They [the merchants] had their money see. They had the fish. That was it. So you went there and whatever fish you got you shipped it to the merchant and you could say that only squared you up. That's how they did it.<sup>191</sup>

Pad (Fly) McGrath stated he left the Labrador because of the poor wages caused by low prices paid by merchants.

Give it up altogether, the fish. Nothing in it. Fish only \$2.70 something a quintal then. Okay for your father [Jim Doyle] .He was skipper. Get one half and then a share for their gear. Sharemen got nothing. Made a hundred dollars for the summer.<sup>192</sup>

Another informant gives an example of a merchant's unfair practices.

Why we had no chance at them times because we were robbed right and left. To give you an instance, before the oil tanks went on the southside of St. John's we'd have our gas come in wooden barrels. They were gauged 58 gallons in a cask, that was American measurement. That would be 44 gallons imperial measurement. When you go to the merchant to get gas he wouldn't charge you for the cask of gas, he would charge ya for 58 gallons. Therefore, he would be robbing you of 14 gallons of gas.<sup>193</sup>

However, Nicholas Smith, a successful captain, had no such problem with a St. John's merchant.

I told Mr. W. C. Job that I needed a little more outfit than the year before, as I had a larger crew and an extra cod-trap, and he replied, "All night,

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<sup>190</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-318, p. 7.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>192</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8693.

<sup>193</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 75-257, pp. 33-34.

Smith, go as many men as you like and Job Brothers are behind you for one thousand dollars or five. I have never forgotten those words of encouragement from the Hon. W. C. Job, and I made a serious promise that I would be truthful and honest with such a man, and thank God I have kept my promise, for after thirty years' dealings we are still the best of friends. On two on three occasions I received from Job Bros. four or five thousand dollars' worth of fishing supplies, and when I got too old to do any more fishing, and thought it was time to stay at home, I did not owe the old firm the value of the *Daily News*. I received liberal accounts, and always paid them with pleasure.<sup>194</sup>

A report from Conception Harbour states that a thirty percent markup was the rate for charging supplies, but that fishermen could go to the merchant of their choice.<sup>195</sup> For this markup, the merchants took on the responsibility of outfitting the fisherman, transporting them and their gear, and collecting the fish in the fall.

Examples of areas where conflict could have arisen but did not may be seen. One story, told by George Rich of Rigolet, relates the reaction to a Labradorian stealing from a Newfoundland fisherman's cod trap.<sup>196</sup>

[My father] used to fish out of their traps too sometimes, he told me. Get out early in the morning, you know. He'd jig his boat load, punt head of fish out of one of the Newfoundland traps and get ashore again before the boats would come. Went out early one morning. Heard the boat coming. Started to pull out his jigger and got his jigger hooked in the bottom of the trap. He cut his line but the jigger was still in the bottom of the trap. He went to one side then. *You could fish anywhere so long as you didn't fish out of the trap* [emphasis added]. And when they get the jigger, the motor boat, they run over to him and they said: "We found your jigger. I guess this [is] yours. It wasn't here yesterday in the bottom of the trap." The old man told him "yes". The Newfoundlander said, "you're not careful! You didn't jig out of as many traps as I jiggered out of." He said, "You put your

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<sup>194</sup> Smith, pp. 107-108.

<sup>195</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 73-128, p. 7.

<sup>196</sup> This is sometimes referred to as "trimming" a trap or net.



net out next time. Sound the water. See how much, how deep the water is in the bottom of the trap". "Then", he said, "take the net off," he said, "and let the jigger go about so far from the bottom of the trap and lead her down. Newfoundlanders often gave the Labrador people [advice] tell them, they'd be jigging see, tell them "come up alongside boys and fill up your boat".<sup>197</sup>

The giving away of fish that could not be quickly processed was a common custom among fishermen. In this story George's father not only gets away with stealing fish but he is also taught the proper technique of stealing successfully from the traps.

### **Disruptive Tricks**

Although it seems strange that family members would disrupt the fishing period, Tom Walsh recounted this story about one man who, after destroying his father's nets, placed his own in the berth:

I don't know about Pad [Gushue]. He tell you about the time he was coming down the Bay? His father had salmon nets. Good berth. Getting a lot of salmon. Hot day, up cleaning out our own nets. Pad was asking the black dog I had to lie down beside him. Pad was like this [gesturing for dog to get down]. Never looked at me. Next thing [the boat] went right through [the trap] and cut 'me in two halves like a big shoe. And I looking and looking. Tom Whelan was with me in American Harbour. Nick was on a chair before the door. Little Harbour in from this. I tell you [you] almost can push from one side with a boat. Pad said, "Old man." "What's you saying, Pad?" "The devil is after running through the net up there." "What in the devil is run through the net?" "He's gone in pieces." "That right?" "Yes."

We's just on that side and tied fast to the stage head. Went up to get a mug up. Pad get there looking over at him. "Aha, he's gone. He's gone. He's gone." [They went] up and took up their nets, and moved it all, boat and all. When they came back [and] went up to the house, Pad said, "Now I think I'll go for a run." Up and goes and planks down his traps in Nick's berth.

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<sup>197</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8675.



So Uncle Nick went up the next day. "Ha ha me chaps, who owns that net that's up there in me berth?" Pad says, "I don't know." He [Nick] says, "Well look, you're a son of a bitch. You're a sly son of a bitch, you is." That's what he done. Cut his [father's] net in two halves and put his [own] there. True as the cursed god. Hard case Pad Gushue was.

Pad Gushue used a costly mistake he made to his own advantage. However, he was not the only man to interfere with his father's fishing. The following story was told to James Walsh by my father in my presence about a trick he played on his father:

I won't tell what we done with the beer meself and Sandy. We get four doses of [Epsom] salt mixed up and put down in it [home brew]. He [his father] stirred it up. He bought me out a couple of beers. I threw the beer out. The last thing the old man did was got the spoon and got the yeast that was in the bottom [of the crock]. The next day he was out in the boat, he was down in the stern and sat on the bucket all day [suffering from diarrhea] .... That was our game, doing something like that.<sup>198</sup>

He made no mention of any repercussions.

In another of Tom Walsh's stories, he recounted how Nick Gushue had accused him of destroying Nick's lifeboat. Tom left the schooner until Nick was forced by the crew to apologize. Tom was shocked that Nick would think he would destroy something that could be needed to save a life, maybe even his own.<sup>199</sup>

Another story is told of avoidance of work on Lady Day [August 15.]<sup>200</sup> It was customary on this day for the Catholic fishermen to give the day's fish to the church. One

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<sup>198</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8697.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Lady Day refers to the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven, August 15. On this day the Catholic fishermen gave all the fish they caught to the church in their community.

of the fishermen shook up the weatherglass and said, "the glass is crazy, we better not go out [fishing] today."<sup>201</sup>

### **Interview with James Doyle**

On April 1, 1984, I used a questionnaire to interview my father, Jim Doyle, in his home in Colliers. I believe the taping would have been more successful if it were done in the kitchen where Jim is used to talking. The interview itself was rather difficult to conduct because of the need to ask sensitive questions. Jim made it clear that, in his experience, there was no conflict on the Labrador, just people doing their work. I interspersed my more sensitive questions with ordinary questions about travel arrangements and work rounds and followed up the interview with some written questions and a telephone conversation. Unfortunately the tape and the pen cannot capture the way Jim's face lit up when he remembered tricks he played on the Labrador. It seems that the light moments are what he chose to remember.

Jim was born in Colliers in 1913, the second child of James Doyle and Mary O'Brien. Jim's father had lived with his Uncle Jim and Aunt Mag. Their only child, Mary Ann, died and therefore, Jim's father inherited the house when his uncle died, and Aunt Mag raised Jim and his sister when their mother died in 1915. Mag died in 1926, and Jim continued to live there with his father and sister until 1943, when he married and moved to Riverhead in Colliers.

Jim's father, Uncle Jimmy Doyle, was a fisherman whose house was a gathering place where as many as twenty men came to court his daughter, have a drink, sing a few

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<sup>201</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8692.

songs, or tell a few stories. Such was the life Jim was used to and he did not want to be left out of it in the summer time. He pestered his father for three years to take him on the Labrador. In 1925, at the age of eleven, he took his first trip on a schooner hired by J.W. Hiscock from Brigus and skippered by Stephen John Kennedy. They left Conception Harbour with about fifty to sixty people aboard from Colliers and Conception Harbour. Jim was sea sick before they sailed out of the harbour. They spent that summer at Splitting Knife.

Sometimes a man or two would go ahead to mark the berths, but usually the crews traveled together and took whatever berths were left. According to Jim, there was no competition as every one hundred fathoms was a berth. The schooners did not come until later and could not fish in too close to the land. Although the landsmen got the choice berths, the schooners get more fish. But even though twenty-two schooners fished there one summer, everyone get a load of fish. No one stole a berth to Jim's knowledge.

No one stayed at the fishing premises over the winter. Sometimes the natives (livyers) would stay in the cabins while trapping, but they left everything as they saw it and would sometimes visit the fishermen during the summer; fishermen in other locations were not so lucky with their neighbours. At Splitting Knife, there were no Inuit, and therefore no huskies around these islands to pose a threat to children. Little contact was had with foreign sailors, even though they sometimes loaded their fish on the foreign vessels for Hiscock. The sailors helped with the loading, but there was no socializing. No one ever took seriously ill. Jim mentioned that a doctor came on the mail boat every two weeks. There was a hospital at nearby Indian Harbour.



Jim certainly enjoyed his summers on the Labrador despite yearly storms and potential lack of fish or good prices. "More went in the hole than came out on top," he said, but he, himself, lost money only once and that was the last year he went. Fishing where they did seemed to keep them isolated from conflicts other fishermen experienced. He heard no mention of the cases Wornell handled. But then, as he said, "Labrador is a big place."

Besides the "scattered" fight, there were some accounts of conflicts with nature. One August, hailstones as big as camphor balls fell, frightening the girls. Pieces of ice fell in Indian Harbour and broke out the windows in the hospital. Jim said he was caught out in storms a few times but always managed to get to land. He was also caught in storms on the passage. When asked what was his worst summer, he said it was the year he took nineteen days to get home on the *Kyle*.<sup>202</sup>

### **Cooperation**

Newfoundland stories record the Labrador people awaiting their arrival in the spring, coming out in their boats to the schooner or steamer to meet them and to carry them to their houses. Friendships developed based on shared respect for fishing ability and on common interests in singing, dancing, yarning, and in cruising (visiting). In 1894, Lydia Campbell, the daughter of an Englishman and an Inuit woman wrote:

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<sup>202</sup> See Chapter five for further details.

It was and is a Labrador custom to give anyone, dark or white, something to eat while they were at our house and bedding so the Indians was always kind to us.<sup>203</sup>

This custom is still carried on by Labrador and Newfoundland fishermen today.

The story is told of a Newfoundland floater crew in the early 1900s cooking a meal of seal meat given to them by an Inuk [Inuit man]. Another Inuk who happened along at meal time was given some seal. After chewing on it awhile, he asked if the seal had been taken that morning. When asked why, his reply was "It's still warm." Evidently, he did not have a tradition of cooking seal meat. Although Newfoundlanders and Labradorians enjoyed and shared the same food, it was not always prepared in the same way.

Other evidence of the differences in Inuit foodways is presented by Kitty (Phillips) McCarthy in this story of two cultures cooperating, despite language barriers.

There was one old Huskimo. I supposed he was five or six hundred pounds. He was big and he was as yellor. I was going around. I didn't get in bed. Go out into the kitchen when the cook was. I washed the dishes with one hand and she'd wipe 'em. I was up to the window this day and he pointed for me to come down. He couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand him. Down I comes. I was upstairs, down I came to the back door, and he was pointin' to this and that. Used to shake his head he didn't want it when I put my hand on something. I went ever to a big pile of chick weeds four or five feet high with all the stuff (food waste) that was heaved on it. He shook himself that was what he wanted. He started eating it. I stood by the door [watching him] eating it. Beggar, I was turned to come in and he called me again. I had to pick another armful. Huskimos never cooks food. They eats raw fish, guts and all. All kinds of dirt.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Lydia Campbell, *Sketches of Labrador Life* (1894; rpt. Happy Valley-Goose Bay: *Them Days*, 1980), p. 32.

<sup>204</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8631.

Labradorians might have come to enjoy Newfoundland food out of pure necessity as the following story will illustrate. The incident took place in 1904 when the schooner the *Winnie F. Tuck* met with a storm and went to a Labrador cove to make some repairs.

Two families of natives about fourteen or fifteen of them were there. It was like we were sent in there to save people. We saw something crawling down to the beach. We sent a boat ashore and found the two families starving. They lived on ducks' eggs and gull eggs and mussels for two months. We had six fishing crews aboard about five people on a crew including girls and their families. Each family had their own summer grub aboard. They all chipped together to give the natives some. We were there about five or six hours and then left.<sup>205</sup>

Labradorians were by no means always on the receiving end of the relationship with Newfoundlanders. The Inuit goods and practices, such as sealskin boats, travel by dog sled and techniques of seal hunting are probably better known by Newfoundlanders than borrowings from Innu culture, such as snowshoes, canoes and intimate knowledge of the habits of caribou. Newfoundlanders, like the Inuit, were coastal people and their winter trades were lumbering, coasting, and sealing rather than hunting and trapping. Labradorians often greeted Newfoundlanders with a gift of seal or birds and sent them home with sealskin boots, grasswork, and good advice. They also provided them with much needed services. Reverend Waghorne, for example, wrote that Newfoundlanders depended upon Labradorians to write their correspondence for them during the summer.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 75-257, pp. 9-10.

<sup>206</sup> Arthur C. Waghorne, introduction, Campbell, on inside cover.



This story, told by Alder Ford of Makkovik, demonstrates the Newfoundlanders' appreciation for Labradorian sealskin boots. In talking about the price of boots Mr. Ford said:

The most ones that'd buy boots was the Newfoundland fishermen in the summers. They'd have boats they'd exchange for skin boots, they'd rather have skin boots than money. If you wanted a boat you'd give so many pairs of skin boots. I remember my uncle gave forty pairs of boots for a motor boat with no engine in her.<sup>207</sup>

Many Labradorians lived in close contact with Newfoundlanders. George Rich told me that the Labradorians often used fishermen's huts for "warm ups" when travelling in the winter time. If any food was taken, a pelt was left in return.

### **Blackflies & Mosquitoes**

A common theme in stories of the Labrador fishery is the frustration and problems caused by blackflies, mosquitoes, and stouts.<sup>208</sup> Tom Doyle recalled how tormented they were by flies when going up in Pottle's Bay for wood: "Then the flies would eat you." Jim Doyle elaborated a little:

One time we was up the bay [Pottle's Bay] for a lead of browse [boughs]. Be coming out. Had to drop the wood and put your nose down in the moss to catch your breath for flies.<sup>209</sup>

Captain Matt Whelan detailed how much of a torment the flies could be when they went for wood in Pottle's Bay:

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<sup>207</sup> Alder Ford, *Them Day*, 4: 2 (1978), p. 9.

<sup>208</sup> Local name for horseflies and deerflies.

<sup>209</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8697.

Flies were really bad. One chap from Conception Harbour, Dave Wade, with us. Younger than me. Only a little bit of a boy. Almost devoured him, eyes closed up. Had to carry him aboard the boat. When we came down they had to lead him from the stage head. Two on three days and couldn't work. He was eaten so much that his eyes closed up - out around the headlands. Out around the fishing areas they weren't that bad. Up in the bay they were a scourge. No fly oil.<sup>210</sup>

I had been tempted to bury my face while spreading caplin on Tickeraluck Island.

Despite warnings I had received in narrative form I found it impossible to believe how dangerous the flies could be:

In May-June 1976, I went to Postville, Labrador, working as an "archaeological field assistant" for the Newfoundland Museum at a Dorset Eskimo site there which was about to be ploughed under by new construction. I spent a total of three and a half weeks in Postville, boarding with a local family. While there I heard many stories about transportation on the Labrador coast. In particular, scare stories about Lab Airways were common. But I also heard the following story about a St. John's businessman carrying on his business on the Coast. I can't remember who told it to me but it went like this. The businessman arrived one morning in a community (I don't remember if it was named) and did his business before noon. He was to meet someone at a part of the community a little distance inland in the afternoon, but since he had some time to spare, he thought he would walk. There were 2 ways: by road and over a marsh. He thought he'd go over the marsh. He went alone. He never showed up at his appointment and he never returned to the boat in the harbour. A search party went out after dark but they never found him till next morning. It had been a warm day with plenty of flies when he set out. He was found with his face clawed to strips with his own nails, scratching at fly bites. He had apparently gone crazy with the flies and died on the marsh.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

<sup>211</sup> This story was told to me by Philip Hiscock in June of 1984 while we were talking about my travel arrangements to the Labrador. We spoke of it again over coffee in the student centre of Memorial University, January 28, 1986 and Philip wrote out the text of the story for me. Postville is on Figure 1, 6.

When I told this story to the people on Tickeraluck Island as a possible tall tale, they accepted it as possibly being a true story. They informed me that the husky puppy owned by the children was the only one in the litter to survive attacks from flies.

No tall tales were recorded during my interviews in Colliers; however, some reference to the flies from Labrador are described in the above personal narratives. Their intensity has earned them a place in the folklife of Labrador, as reflected in the following archival account.

Labrador mosquitoes are credited with being the biggest and most fierce in the world. They do not carry malaria. It always seemed to me, the further north I went, the thicker, bigger, and more fierce they were. The crew of a schooner, sailing along the coast, in a light breeze, saw what they thought was a hard wind squall gathering north of them. They began to prepare for the squall when it would strike and accordingly brailed their gaff topsail, hauled down their topmast staysail and flying jib. Having done that much, they discovered it was not a squall, but a cloud of mosquitoes (nippers). The mosquitoes hit the schooner's mainsail and took it clean away. Next year in the same vicinity, they met the same cloud of mosquitoes and believe it or not, each one was wearing a white canvas jacket.<sup>212</sup>

### **Supernatural Beliefs**

Among the most prevalent folk beliefs associated with the Labrador are these connected with death, and especially omens of death and "forerunners." Although the Labrador did have a mail service (twice a season delivery) and a wireless service, news usually arrived via word of mouth and/or the next boat home. Sometimes news of death spread much more quickly. A nine-year-old boy who lost his father on his first voyage recalled that his mother knew of his father's death before the body returned home.

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<sup>212</sup> Ralph Barrett Collection, TDLA.



He said she had a very bad night sleeping the night he died and awoke telling the others who remained with her the news of his death. Days later when the minister visited bringing the news of her husband's death to her, she was already prepared and was making arrangements for the burial of his body.<sup>213</sup>

In this story, the head of the family had been struck down and the other members continued on with life. The sons packed the corpse in salt for the trip home and returned to their fishing. The mother prepared herself and the rest of the family and made arrangements for the burial of the body. In the fall when the summer's fishery was over and the family reunited, the events would be re-enacted in family narratives and told again for neighbours and years later for the researcher. Life and the fishery would continue despite this and other drownings.

There is a story told of a Newfoundland man rowing to shore in a stormy night to see his girlfriend. The girl's father passed him on the stairs and thought it strange because he could not understand why the man would be going up the stairs. The father soon heard at the wharf that the boat had swamped and the Newfoundlander had never made it ashore. He reasoned that when the man drowned, his mind was on getting ashore to see his girlfriend and his spirit just kept on going.<sup>214</sup> Narratives of death are to be expected from fishing families.

When somebody died, especially someone having anything to do with the sea, a ghost light was bound to be seen by someone. Mr. F. tells a story of a drowned man who

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<sup>213</sup> MUNFLA 79-400, p. 10.

<sup>214</sup> TDLA 487 ms, p. 3.

returned to ask that the deck boards he stole be returned to their rightful owner.<sup>215</sup>

Sometimes ghosts are seen but no contact is made, as this narrative from Colliers demonstrates.

Lots of those things, old wrinkles. There was one time me father was coming from Cut Throat one night. He heard somebody throw down a turn of lumber over the bank and there's no one living within a half mile of it. He heard it right plain when they throwed a turn of lumber down over the bank. Could be a sign of something.

I heard Ned Trahey say, even in the Run off Shell Island where they lived, they saw a woman on the island. There was no one on the island in the meantime but they saw a woman.<sup>216</sup>

Despite these sightings, Tom was not worried about ghosts. He and Uncle Jimmy Doyle had an unusual pastime for Catholic men.

We used to be going around digging up graves down there, myself and Uncle Jimmy. Pirates's graves. Me and Jimmy with a piece, over in the Run there was graves. Kind of reddish hair - was just as fresh as the day it was buried - all that was there except for the box. The box, the board was still good in the bog.<sup>217</sup>

Other beliefs include those associated with vessels and lucky and unlucky days.

Greta Hussey's father would never launch a boat on Friday but always on a Saturday if he

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<sup>215</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 76-335, p. 38.

<sup>216</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8678.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

could for it was said, "Saturday's sail would never fall."<sup>218</sup> This was believed in Rigolet also.<sup>219</sup>

### **Summary**

The fishermen who went down to the Labrador went to fish either from the land or from boats. They were subject to conflict with man and with nature. Storms and wrecks were normal aspects of fishermen's lives wherever they fished. I have concentrated on other areas, such as trap disputes, because these had to be sorted out among the fishermen with support from travelling officials rather than the more permanent structure available in the home communities. I interviewed one fisherman to see which, if any, of these conflicts had been experienced by him, and in what manner they had been resolved. His testimony reinforced the view that each group has its own view of history. The experiences of people in Splitting Knife while similar to the Straits area and, closer to home, Indian Harbour, yet they were also unique to their particular place on the Labrador. The following chapter presents a sampling of the narratives of entertainment at the Labrador fishery.

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<sup>218</sup> Hussey, p. 11.

<sup>219</sup> Field notebook 1.



## CHAPTER 5

### ENDING THE SEASON: HARBOUR DAYS AND THE TRIP HOME

The time spent on the Labrador was comprised of work, sleep, and play. During the peak of the fishing season, if the weather was good and the fish were running, there was little time for sociability until the season ended in mid-August. The tasks of washing out and drying the fish on the bawn were also activities for good weather days. The main times of socializing were during stormy weather when fishermen neither went on the water nor cured the catch, on Sundays which were kept as a day of rest, and in the evenings. The term "harbour days" is used to denote socializing activities which took place on the Labrador.

#### Harbour Days

Mrs. R. South River, C.B., described "shack time" (non-fishing time) as follows:

On stormy days, "harbour days," the crew usually gathered in the skipper's house to talk and "yarn," maybe even sing some songs. Occasionally on a Saturday night members of several crews may get together and with the aid of an accordion they would have a dance if it could be called that or maybe they would just sit around and yarn. There may even be a visitor or two from a nearby harbour to help pass the time.<sup>220</sup>

She also spoke about visiting on Sundays from harbour to harbour:

They would find some of the happenings of the previous week or if the mail boat had been in there might be some news from home. This was about the only recreation they had.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 78-188, p. 11.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

There were many dances, especially in the fall when the banker schooners with big crews of twenty to twenty-two men came down.

[We would] play accordion, scatter violin. Everything danced out from a step dance to swinging reel. Yeah, oh boy, we had a lot of pleasure. Times was rugged, it was rugged. Everybody enjoyed it. That was the way of life then you know.<sup>222</sup>

Clearly, the function of these stories, songs, dances, and games is in line with what Brunvand says in his essay "Folk Groups: Bearers of American Tradition":

The long exposure of small bands of toughened men to the elements led them to fall back on their stock of stories and songs for entertainment.<sup>223</sup>

Greta Hussey makes an interesting point in her chapter on entertainment: "Once you crossed the Strait of Belle Isle, it never seemed to be a sin to play cards but they were never allowed at home. If you played cards the devil would surely get you."<sup>224</sup> She goes on to tell a story where the crew were arguing over cards and the skipper threw them in the stove. Immediately the stove lid literally flew off the stove and landed on the floor. This caused quite a scare among the crew and needless to say, there weren't many card arguments after that.<sup>225</sup> Apart from card playing there were other kinds of entertainment such as: knot tying; tricks and puzzles; story-telling (old yarns, ghost stories, travel stories, jokes); and singing songs.

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<sup>222</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 76-335, p 11.

<sup>223</sup> Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 29.

<sup>224</sup> Hussey, p. 64.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

## Songs

Life was not all work and no play for the fishermen. It was customary for the Newfoundlanders to come ashore on Saturday nights for dances and stay for church services on Sunday. The Straits area is renowned among folksong scholars for its song traditions. The singers, song makers and times (social gatherings) of the Labrador Straits have been the subject of many student projects, and also a Quebec-Labrador Foundation fieldworker did some collecting there in 1976. Hussey mentions several songs, including "The Little Mohee," "Little Dickie Melvin," "My Bonny Boy is Young But He's Growing," "John Dooley's Punt," "Down in Grady Harbour I Went One Time," "Paul Jones," "Young Bungari," "Be Dad Then Says I, I Don't Care If I Do," "The Kaiser's Dream," "My Old Ragadoo," "I'll Forgive but I'll Never Forget," some old spirituals from the old Sankey song book, "Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight" and "Pull for the Shore Sailor," and if there were no children present, "The Countryman's Lassie" or "The Old Cellar Door."<sup>226</sup> A major regional collection of one hundred and thirty-eight songs was published in the early 1960s by MacEdward Leach.<sup>227</sup>

Of these song traditions on the Labrador, Ben Letto says:

T'was all songs in them days, in our days, I mean. You'd get in and one would sing a song, then another would sing a song. They all had stories, these songs. There were lots of good songs about murders aboard ship and all this kind of things. That's all you do then to pass the time, eh, sing songs and tell stories and it went from one to the other. What I didn't know, someone else knowed. T'was lots of songs made up then, just

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>227</sup> MacEdward Leach, *Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1965).



common folks around would make up a song. ...I was very young then when them songs was sung, and I never took no attention to it, like, but them old fellers used to know some songs.<sup>228</sup>

Similarly, John M. Earle said of one of the Labrador singers:

Ellis (Lie) Tracey, a local singer, really helped to break up the monotony of many long winter nights and brought many giggles to those around him. Lie sang whether he felt like it or not. Not only did he compose and sing his own songs he also did imitations of various radio characters on programmes like the Doyle News complete with steamer reports and personal messages using an empty tin can for the microphone effect.<sup>229</sup>

The interaction between Newfoundlanders and Labradorians resulted, at times, in inter-group rivalry. There is at least one account of this rivalry finding an outlet in song. Apparently, some Newfoundlanders took exception to a song composed here and wrote an answering song. The local composer immediately came back with an answer to the answer song, and thus had the final word.<sup>230</sup>

Around 1940 the battery radio came to Labrador. After the Gerald S. Doyle Bulletin on Saturday night, the Jackie Walsh program came on and someone would step dance if "the Irish toe tapping music came on."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Them Days* 3:3 (1978)

<sup>229</sup> *Them Days* 10:3 (1985), pp. 54-55. One of Lie's songs, "Across the Straits," is published here as well.

<sup>230</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 77-356. Similarly Barter Wareham's song titled "Rubber Boot Song" was answered by "Tom" in Baxter's song.

<sup>231</sup> Hussey, pp. 77-78. For more on the Gerald S. Doyle Bulletin, see Philip Hiscock, "Folklore and Popular Culture in Early Newfoundland Broadcasting: An Analysis of Occupational Narrative, Oral History and Song Repertoire," M.A. Thesis (Folklore),

In the fall Labradorians moved inland to live on their trapping grounds in little communities of one or two families. It was the custom for the scattered winter communities to gather in one place, usually the Hudson Bay Company post, for Christmas. These gatherings became the occasion for feasting, dancing, and the singing of songs. Clarice Hopkins, a Labradorian now living in Goose Bay, spoke in great detail about songs she and other members of her family had composed. At age fifteen, she composed a song about her sisters and their boyfriends from Newfoundland. The song, a moniker, was thirty-two verses long and included everyone at the gathering in addition to the Newfoundland crowd.

I'd compose [songs] around Christmas and forget them unless somebody wrote them down. I think the one about Cupids was copied and was in Cupids. That's where I did pick up a lot of verses I had forgotten because they had taken it back there and kept it alive for awhile.<sup>232</sup>

Clarice went on to say that the younger people mentioned in the song had kept on singing it because it was about them. She reiterated that songs were composed for special occasions, sung, and then forgotten unless someone wrote them down or kept on singing it. To her, a song was "really a record of the things we were doing." While hers were always romantic songs about boys and girls teasing each other, her brother and other fishermen composed songs about fishing or about working at the nearby whaling factory. One song composed by her brother (another moniker song) listed all the bankers (fishing

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Memorial University of Newfoundland (1986) and "Folk Programming Versus Elite Information; *The Doyle Bulletin* and the *Public Dispatch*," *Culture & Tradition* 12 (1988), pp. 41-59.

<sup>232</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8629. See also *Bounty of a Barren Coast*.



vessels that prosecuted both the Grand Bank fishery and the Labrador fishery) and their skippers and recorded the visit of bankers as an occasion for having a dance. Moniker songs serve an oral historical purpose besides their synchronic function of honouring local people - it is often by means of such songs that local history is retained.

Songs were also used as a vehicle for maintaining acceptable behaviour. When one Newfoundlander outfitted Labradorians when another Newfoundland merchant had refused, the event was duly recorded in a song which George Rich remembered and sang for me.

### **Dances**

Square dances, which were held in the homes of the livyers with young and old participating, were considered the highlight of the entertainment, according to Hussey. The children were called "the tom cods" when they were having their set. At one dance the floor boards gave away and at another the stove was knocked over.<sup>233</sup> Captain Matt Whelan recalls dances on the Labrador with other Newfoundlanders:

Late in the fall, have spare time. Dances sometimes in the bunkhouses or any place big enough to held the dance. The bankers used to came down there in the fall. The Grand Bank dory fishermen - good supply of alcohol they'd get in St. Pierre. About once a week there'd be a dance. Any other spare time you had you'd pick bakeapples. Very plentiful on the Labrador. Apart from that not much to do.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Hussey, p. 77. For an ethnography of Newfoundland dance traditions, see Colin Quigley, *Close to the Floor: Folk Dance in Newfoundland*, St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland. Newfoundland enjoyed a dance revival in the 1980s, and at the 15th Annual Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival, August 3-5, 1991, the St. John's Folk Arts Council Dancers put on a demonstration of traditional dances.

<sup>234</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.



Jack Conway recalls dances he attended while working in the whale factory in

Gready Harbour:

Some Sunday nights Maurice Hair from Harbour Grace, who was looking after the whale factory, loaned us the house. (We would) have the big dance, break 'en down, till about 12 o'clock. Then come home and get an hour or two's rest and then start the fishing."<sup>235</sup>

The only description I collected of dancing with the natives and Inuit comes from

Paddy (Fly) McGrath:

The native houses were the real place for dances, square dances, swinging. They had another way to do it. They was nice. All they want was dance, dance, could sing in their own language. You wouldn't never know what it would be. Never used to wash. Happy, healthy. Couldn't go near for the smell of the clothes. Girls put hands around you, couldn't be rude, had to get another way to make them knock it off. We was rotten ourselves but they was too as rotted. All they wanted was the fellas and the beer, the girls. Oh boy. How could you do it? Lots of moonshine, lots of dances. The girls on the Labrador never covered up, only a skirt on, that's all, nothing under. Never cut a hair. When they sit down to dance they cut [cocked] up their legs. Get half drunk. I could tell you hundreds of stories about the Labrador and the roughery. The storms force you in and you get in contact with them people. The way [the natives] talk "youse and I," say "I and he for the night." I was a perfect dancer, get the girls out dancing. They want you to take them home. Only footpaths and rocks (?). They go to kiss you, there must have been an inch of blubber on them. All they wanted was a man, knew you wouldn't get back but didn't care as long as they get a man for the night. ...We didn't have much sense, and they had less. Lots of times you can't help yourselves. I was as bad as any. Had a few in my day.

The girls from Conception Bay would be with their people, so you had no chance [to get out with them]. They weren't the kind to go out to dances with the Eskimo men, wouldn't look at the Eskimos, all dirt and blubber. They'd go to dances with their own people. I used to do it for fun. [Wore] old clothes. If you went to bed with them, you would have to jump in the

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<sup>235</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8698.

water the next day. The beds they had, no mattresses as such, roll themselves. We used to go over there for the fun of it.<sup>236</sup>

By contrast, when McGrath spoke of going to dances at home, he said he always dressed up in good clothes, silk shirts. He was known as a "wild one." He said he lost his reputation when accused of fathering a child in Newfoundland.

### **Gulching**

The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* defines "gulch" as "to frequent a sheltered hollow for sexual intimacy."<sup>237</sup> The earliest description comes from the *Journal of American Folklore* 8 (29) in 1895:

[Gulch] has come, on the Labrador coast, to have a meaning peculiar to that region and to these who frequent it. In summer, men, women, and children from Newfoundland spend some weeks there at the fishing, living in a very promiscuous way. As there is no tree for shelter for hundreds of miles of islands and shores, parties resort to the hallows for secret indulgence. Hence gulching has, among them, become a synonym for living a wanton life.

Gulching was a continuation of pursuing the girls on the boat.

"Gulching. That's what they called it on the Labrador, gulching on the long grass." When asked if it was a great pastime, Tom Doyle answered, "Oh boy, it'll never come back any more." He went on to say that "the girls back home wouldn't know about it, nobody told on anybody."<sup>238</sup>

The most complete account I have of gulching was given by Paddy (Fly)

McGrath:

There was one time we went even to Cartwright to get a girl. Went up with a real old dark one, lay down on the grass. Eight or nine big old Labrador dogs. They had like to eat me. She was all night, gulching. I wasn't long

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<sup>236</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8693.

<sup>237</sup> G. M. Story, *et al.*, p. 230.

<sup>238</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8678.



gulching when the dogs were after me. Never had time to look at her. They were right crazy about the white [men].<sup>239</sup>

While the female informants never made any references to gulching, Alice (Doyle) McGrath did recall that Jack Mahoney from North River would crawl in bed with her on the passage despite her protests that her father would kill her. The girls used to throw salt in the eyes of the boys who tried to get in bed with them. Similarly, Alice threw salt at a woman who was "cracked"<sup>240</sup> after her father, calling the woman an old fool for going after a man too old for her. Alice did get involved with a man from Bacon Cove while she was on the Labrador, despite having a boyfriend at home.

Kathy Kimiecik, in her study of courtship patterns in modern day Newfoundland, concentrated on short-term encounters, or relationships that are not characterized by a strong sense of commitment by either party involved, as opposed to marriage-oriented dating.<sup>241</sup> Clearly both types of courtship were carried out during the season on the Labrador. For the most part, however, the emphasis seems to have been on short-term relationships, for according to Jim Doyle, most men went out with different girls back home in Conception Bay during the winter. When asked if quarrels ever developed over girls, Jim replied that there were some fights, but these were disagreements over nothing, as it was only a pastime to be going with girls down there.

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<sup>239</sup> MUNFLA 86013, C8693.

<sup>240</sup> Infatuated with.

<sup>241</sup> Kathryn Kimiecik, "Aspects of Contemporary Courtship in a Rural Newfoundland Community," M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987, p. 6; see also Karen Szala, "Clean Women and Quiet Men: Courtship and Marriage in a Newfoundland Fishing Village," M.A. thesis, MUN, 1979.



You was only down there to make a living. You wasn't going down there looking for girls.<sup>242</sup>

Fighting was not a serious issue, because there wasn't much liquor "on the go."

Sometimes they made moonshine. On one occasion, there was a big fight when everyone was drunk. Jim said he had a fight with a door and hurt three knuckles.

### **Pranks and Practical Jokes**

John R. Scott in his study of practical jokes of the Newfoundland seal fishery found that pranks and practical jokes served several functions: general entertainment, releasing hostility, and controlling behaviour while at the same time maintaining the all-important and basic social rule of isolation occupations - avoid direct confrontation.<sup>243</sup>

On the Labrador, men entertained themselves by playing tricks, testing their strength, or sitting around telling lies about their big catches of fish and where they caught them. All the men worked hard to get fish. "If you didn't get the fish, you didn't get the money."

But they found time for fun. Jim related two of his tricks.

J.D. There was one year we was down there. Used to go over to what we called The Run where Tim Trahey and Ned was at. There was a crowd of us in the camp and they had a lamp upon the shelf. And I had a tooth gone and was sat right down under the lamp. And I'd give a little blow like this [blowing out of the side of his mouth] and blew the lamp out. Tim'd come over and light the lamp and just as he'd go over, I'd blow the lamp out again. And he said, "What's wrong with that lamp tonight." I said, "I don't know." And, just as he'd light it again, I'd give another blow and the wind hit his hand and he caught me.

C.M. (laughing) And he caught you?

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<sup>242</sup> MUNFLA, ms, 84-220.

<sup>243</sup> John R. Scott, "Practical Jokes of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974), pp. 275-283.

J.D. Always playing tricks.

C.M. Did you get any tricks played on you?

J.D. Ah. No. Had to take off so he wouldn't catch me. That was in the 30s.

Another popular trick was putting a sod on the chimney (referred to locally as the "funnel") to smoke out the cabin.

Alice (Doyle) McGrath said she was the victim of tricks played by Ned Trahey:

Ned Trahey made homebrew on the old man and he rigged a broom up like a man and put clothes on it, lay it in bed and covered it up. When I went to bed here was the man covered up in me bed. How much did I curse on him.<sup>244</sup>

She later said she had never told her brother Jim about Ned Trahey, "who used to do everything with me because I never get mad with them. Ned was a nice man. I liked him." In contrast, she described another man who had filled her bed with fish slime as "a real tyrant."<sup>245</sup>

Tricks were also played on a deaf-mute man and another man who did not know the deaf-mute (manual) alphabet.

Had a game one Lady Day (*q. v.*, Chapter 4). Matt Whelan, the old man, Charlie McGrath all down with Matt. Charlie, Sandy, Captain Matt, and Joe Cole, Jim Cole and Tommy Costigan and Mike were out on the point. Had a big brew for Lady's Day. I wasn't drinking or Sandy wasn't drinking. They were all drinking up and they got drunk and poor Matt Doyle the dummy. Joe Cole was telling Matt the dummy to ask Matt Whelan is you foolin' me? Joe said to Matt Whelan say yes. Matt said yes. Had to hold [Matt the dummy] on. (J.W. Some tough too.) ...Joe said to Matt Whelan you said you'd fight him.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8697.



James Walsh recounted a trick played by Alice (Doyle) Kenny and Mary Costello on Dan Flynn:

I minds one time our girl Mary Costello from Conception Harbour and Alice Doyle from Colliers, two of them got together. [Dan Flynn] had a new pair of cover-alls, you know. And we were going up the Bay to get some wood before starting off. They got a needle and sewed his over-alls. He was blind in one eye. Began just at daylight, lamp lit, he was kickin' and kickin' trying to get the legs down through the over-alls. One fella' said to him "Skipper, what are you at?" "Holy jumpin' I can't get me leg out." "Come here till I see what's wrong. It may be caught up. They had his over-alls sewed up. He done some cussing.

Women worse than the men [playing tricks]. Every kind. We were, I was out only a young fella'. I was going with a girl over in the gut: I used to get home late in the night, just in time to go out in the boat. [Mary Costello would] Have bucket of water, hung up over the door. Strike the bottom and it all used to come down over me - Mary Costello.<sup>247</sup>

Sometimes tricks were not premeditated, but were a response to "tormenting" as is evident in this story by Jack Conway:

Mary Walsh - Mary had no supper cooked. She was coming with a bucket of water. I don't knew what happened, she fell asleep or what. I got to tormenting her. They used to heave in the blubber first when putting in wood or stuff first. The blubber used to catch just like oil. Many come down for a can of blubber. I get to tormenting her. Going up to the outhouse the rocks were like stair steps. I get tormenting her. Mary got vexed and threw the blubber over me. I had to change me clothes. But that wasn't the worse. She still wasn't clear. When I come in the next day she was to the scrubbin' board [scrubbing my clothes] and she was throwing up.<sup>248</sup>

To pass the time the men were out fishing, Alice and her friend Mary Lewis went out on the stage head catching tomcods for sport. They had to throw all the tomcods over the wharf because "Uncle Pad would get mad with us." Once Alice barred up a rat with

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8698.



rocks that was near their drinking brook. After she freed the rat, it came into her room and ate up all her aprons.<sup>249</sup>

James Walsh also recalled a prank two men played on another man designed to keep the man away from their area:

I remember one time meself and Dick Conway from Colliers - Ag's Dick - "Dough Boy Dick" - right down in James Cove. There was an old fella' from Carbonear. He was blind. He always used to be down to Steve Ghaney's. Always. Anyway. There was a big soft place like a soft marsh. They used to put the blubber there. Used to heave the blubber puncheons there. He said to me, "Jim," he said, "Penny is down to Steve's again." "Is you sure?" I said. "Yes," he said. "He went down." "Well, I'll give you a guarantee he won't be there tomorrow night."

Anyhow we knowed what time he leaved, about one or two o'clock that was time he leaved. Twelve o'clock. The two of us got a white sheet off the girl's bed. Get so far away from one another, perhaps 10 or 15 feet away from me. Anyway he came up. He seemed \_\_\_\_\_. He was kind of excited poor man. Right along he crept, right close to me. Well I guarantee he said, "Did I see something or is anything in me eyes?" I rose up me height and he took off. And get in the soft spot where they had the blubber in. He went from that night to his \_\_\_\_\_. He was looking up where Dick Conway was. We were dying laughing but not hard enough for him to make out what it was. Dick crawled down on his knees. Come night again and looked out over his shoulder. \_\_\_\_\_. This time. Anyhow he was there an awful spell. We took off the sheets and let on how we were coming down for bait and come across. We said to him "What are you doing here? My dear man, I'm after seeing a spirit. I'm here this hour or an hour and a half down in the bog or whatever's here." Now we said, "You won't come here no more."<sup>250</sup>

### Stories of Strength

One story popular with the informants was the story of Joby Phillips' rock:

In Batteau when the old fellows used to be going down on the schooners [they'd] be ashore, they'd be trying their strength. There was a big square

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<sup>249</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.

<sup>250</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8697

rock there. I think it was two fellows lifted it. And Joby goes over and catches fast to her and lifts her up and he throws him down and he hit edge on and that's where he stopped at. He said "He's a kind of petty but a bit heavy". ...I used to hear my father talk about it and all the old fellows. That's when they used to be going back and forth on the schooners.<sup>251</sup>

When Captain Matt was asked if he knew the story about Joby Phillips, the strong man, he responded:

Phillips used to go with the Whelans. One of the crew but didn't go that year (1857). Only survivor. Two Phillips brothers, George and Joby. Built that boat on the North Side. Two Phillips brothers were supposed to carry all the heavy lumber that went into making the boat. Keel - heavy. I used to hear the older people talking about the Phillips bringing out the timber for the boats. Very strong men. Rock in Batteau that Joby was supposed to lift. I don't know how heavy it was. There was supposed to be two or three schooners moored onto the rock. Probably exaggerated a bit.<sup>252</sup>

Paddy (Fly) McGrath said the rock was four by four or five by five.<sup>253</sup>

## Games

"Catching the Thirds" was a chasing game played on the Labrador, 1912-1916:

We used to have a place way up [on Cut Throat Island and] there was a lot of girls there from Brigus, North River, Cupids, girls and men. Poor Mary Skanes was with the Sinjons (St John's), Aunt Beth's daughter, Mary. We used to go up there catching the thirds. A wonderful game, no mistake. Put three there, two there, three there (pointing out a square). Now, where the three was at [they] used to run and go where the two was at. Then the three would go where the two was at. There was a big ring of us, I suppose sixty or seventy in the ring. Poor old Ben [Ghaney] used to be with us. "Phillips," he'd say, "hurry up and find the screws and we'd go and catches the thirds." We used to have some fun.<sup>254</sup>

Another game played was "Rounders."

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<sup>251</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 84-220.

<sup>252</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

<sup>253</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8693.

<sup>254</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8631.



## Harbour Days: Summary

Entertainment was of course the primary function of harbour days; the fishermen needed to escape, in fantasy at least, from their austere environment and their limited means for dealing with it. The stories point out the dangers the fishermen were exposed to: death, the supernatural, loneliness, foreigners, storms and dogs. They also show the joys of living on the Labrador: going to new places, meeting new people, acquiring unusual gifts and a wealth of stories for the people back home.

## The Trip Home

The separation, transition, and incorporation procedures of the trip down were repeated in reverse on the trip back. Bakeapples and souvenirs of native handiwork were packed into the Labrador box to bring to those at home. "Everybody would be expecting us and they'd be glad to see us because we'd be sure and have some little thing, bit of salmon, some souvenir from a Labrador resident."<sup>255</sup> The trip back would be rough because of the time of year and the weight of the fish. Storms would necessitate unscheduled stops in harbours. On these occasions spontaneous dances would be held.<sup>256</sup>

The return trip is strongly associated, for good reason, with the loss of vessels and loss of life. It was during this passage, when schooners were often overloaded with fish and passengers, that they faced the greatest risk from the elements. As described by one observer:

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<sup>255</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-197.

<sup>256</sup> Personal communication. Socializing in Newfoundland always increased when the fishing was finished in the fall. A banker or schooner coming into a harbour was always an occasion for a "time."



She'd be coming up the arm, winged out full of fish. Her sails would be opened and the boat would be low in the water from the weight of the fish.<sup>257</sup>

From this description it is easy to see how the overloaded boats could capsize in a storm. I recorded, however, only one instance of a Colliers vessel being lost:

The last schooner my great-grandfather had was lost in 1857 on the Labrador. Small vessels there but last the Whelans had. (?) Lost with all hands – eleven – off La Scie (*q.v.*, Figure 1, 19). My great-grandfather had a crippled leg and didn't go that year. Burke from Colliers was skipper. Not a crew of 11 but some people up there wanted a passage home. Ran into some bad weather off La Scie – Horse Islands, bad reefs. Two bodies washed ashore. Buried in La Scie, Skipper Burke and another. Very little known about what happened. No survivors. Old man Whelan never went but his sons went and built bunkhouses. Established themselves around Smokey until our time. We were the last to go up.

Flynn. One of the girls. I believe two girls. Burke. Hearn. O'Brien from down the harbour. Ned Doyle – relation of the Whelan's. Great-grandfather's wife was a Doyle.

I remember hearing a lot of talk about accidents and people getting lost, vessels being lost. Two or three people lost from Conception Harbour down around Kitchuses. Number of vessels lost. Vessels lost every year. Storm. Bad weather. No enforcement of regulation. Might have punt aboard. Even so, very little chance of getting ashore. No power. Only sails. When their canvas was lost they couldn't steer. She was at the mercy of the weather then.<sup>258</sup>

Several of my informants were familiar with this 1857 tragedy, but a more recent one, published in the 1899 newspaper, was unknown:

“Two Corpses on Board’: Skipper Matthew Whelan arrives at Colliers, C.B. from Labrador, With This Melancholy Freight.”

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<sup>257</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 81-483, p. 33.

<sup>258</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

The schooner *Mermaid*, Matthew Whelan, arrived home to Colliers from Labrador at 3 o'clock on Friday last with the corpses of his two sons preserved in salt - William and John - on board. They both died within a week of each other, at Indian Harbour, where they had called for medical aid, after leaving Mark's Harbour, down the shore, where they had been fishing. William, who leaves a wife and one child, died on Saturday the 17th of September, and John the following Saturday. It is believed they died of typhoid fever. The father and servant girl had been ill the week before but both recovered. The two young men were the only support of their parents, and a deep gloom has been cast over the village of Colliers where the interment took place today.<sup>259</sup>

Jim Doyle recounted two of his experiences with the return passage, starting with what he describes as the worst trip back, and both stories focus on the tragedies, real or potential, met with on the trip home:

J.D. That's the year we lost two men in Comfort Bight.

C.M. Comfort Bight? Is that on the Labrador?

J.D. Yeah.

C.M. How did you lose them?

J.D. Coming aboard in the night. The boat swamped. Chris Cullen and Joey Walsh.

C.M. From where, Conception?

J.D. Bacon Cove.

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<sup>259</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 16 October 1899.

C.M. Bacon Cove. What do you mean, they were coming aboard the boat, coming aboard the steamer?

J.D. Coming aboard the steamer in the night with their stuff.

C.M. And nobody could get them, rescue them?

J.D. Yes. We spent the next day jig trawling for them before we got them. Had to put them in the box, then salt.

C.M. How did that make you feel?

J.D. What?

C.M. How did it feel, having to trawl for a body?

J.D. Just like you were bringing home a box of salt fish, all in the game.

C.M. All in the game? Never made you feel nervous about going?

J.D. No. Another year, we took a load of fish, nineteen of us up to Comfort Bight and we get caught in a storm at (Ringman?) Bight. Runned in and anchored out of the storm. The wind veered in that night and the next morning, she was just about going up in the cliffs. Couldn't raise the anchor. Had to slip the chain and run for the bottom. T'was all night when we went in there, the wind was up. During the night, the wind veered northeast. Nancy Fall, name of the place. That's the place we nearly leaved her. Came near losing her.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> MUNFLA 84-220, p. 16.



## Narratives of Death and the Supernatural

Not surprisingly, the supernatural figures prominently in tales of the return voyage or of men recently returned from the Labrador. Two Colliers men who were returning from Labrador landed in Conception Harbour and had to walk home past the graveyard, despite a belief in Colliers that one should never, if one could possibly avoid it, pass the graveyard at night. One man, Paddy [Doyle], was very nervous. As he passed the graveyard, he tried to reassure himself by saying that "a lot of good men lay there." to which his companion replied: "Yes, and a lot of bad men too." This story, first told to me in 1978, was retold to me at my father's wake in December 1985.<sup>261</sup>

The supernatural also figures in one informant's account of the above-mentioned drowning of Chris Cullen and Joey Walsh. To obtain a fuller version of this incident, I went to speak with the sons of the two men, Chris Cullen Jr. and James Walsh. Chris could not remember the exact year but James immediately said October 1932 and proceeded to tell the following account.

The time my father got drowned (in 1932) we were all down there, the five of us out of one house. The whole family clear of my mother and sister. We didn't go down until late. The second of July we were down there. My father was with one man and I was with another. We had two different boats and two different skippers. Feller by the name of Dick Hayes I was with. (He was) from Brigus but living (here) in Bacon Cove. My father was with Chris Cullen, the feller that got drowned. Anyway, we had to build a stage. Took a week. Had two small boats. Very small. Took five barrels each. We used to go out with the handline and the jigger. We had, me father and they had 140 (quintals) and we had 130. Had it all made and shipped. And beggar, anyway, we had our boat loaded with luggage and we had her out in the Tickle. Out in the stream. Hauled off.

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<sup>261</sup> Clara Joan Murphy, "Wakes and Funeral Customs of Colliers, Conception Bay, Newfoundland," (1978), MUNFLA, ms., 79-328.

T'was awful rough. My jumping heavens was it ever rough. Black as soot. But there was no wind blowing. And we heard the *Kyle* blowing. She was coming to take her passengers, see. And there was a feller from Brigus by the name of Bobby Rose. He was going to take all our luggage and bring it over when the *Kyle*'d come, see. And be golly anyway, that. They weren't satisfied with that see. When they see the *Kyle* coming up Smokey and dropping (anchor), they took off. Two quintals of fish each, and all their luggage, and a barrel of salt in the midroom, stuck on its own.

Before they left the stage head at all where we were loading it, she was after taking about a half barrel of water then. And I said to them, "Boy you got to be drowned tonight. Take out that barrel of salt. I can't see what you got that for." But the skipper said "I got to come home anyway. We needs salt when we get home." I said "You're awfully foolish men to be at all that stuff. This boat is not fit to go anywhere."

Anyway they shoved off from the stage head, the two of them in a small boat. I suppose she was about three inches from the water, almost sunk then. And I said "You better come back." No it was no good. I was ignored.

Anyway we see about five - ten minutes from that. We seed the search lights come around the harbour, come from the *Kyle*. And the skipper I had said "What's them search lights doing out there"? Boy, I'll tell you what they're doing now b'y," I said. "Me father and skipper are drowned." "Well, you always got the bad word"<sup>262</sup> he said. "No", I said, "I don't, indeed, I haven't. I never had the bad word in my life." "But", I said, "That's what happened. They're after sinking the beat running on the shoal out there or something." And that was o.k. He said "We'll get our boat and go out." "Sure", I said, "we can't get our boat. Our boat is anchored out in the stream." Caught fast to the painter, the rope, and she came in just as easy as there was nothing afoot to her at all.

Se we get aboard and we went out and met a feller in a big boat, *Northern Ville*, and asked him why the search lights going out around the water. He said, "Not much of anything, boy." He said "Who's ye?" And we said, "We're a crew from in there on the island." "There is a crew gone from the island," I said, "And we're going out too, to the *Kyle* to go home." He said, "What's your names?" And we told him the names anywhere. Dick Hayes and James Walsh. He said, "Did you know them two men," he said, "that went out on the boat?" I said, "One of them is me father. The other was the skipper Chris Cullen." He said, "Them two men is drowned. I'm very sorry," he said, "for your trouble." I said, "I knowed that just before I

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<sup>262</sup> A premonition of disaster.



left the land. They were just about sunk before they left but there was no good of talking to them. They wouldn't come in."

Anyway, we went, they took us aboard them their boat, put our boat in tow. And went out and took the luggage and hauled the boat aboard, our row boat. I don't know but they let her go or not. I'm not sure of that just the same. It's a long while ago. I don't know but they let the two boats go.

Anyway the boat that my father and they was in, she was untied and let go you knew to the side of the wharf. Now James, your father, might be able to tell you this the same as I'm going to tell you. She was going back and forth on side of the boat untied. Someone made the remark, Joey Walsh and Chris is not aboard yet. They still down in the boat." And someone else said, "Come aboard, boys." And just as they [the ghosts] come aboard, after five minutes after that, the boat drift off out to sea. That's the last, the end of the boat.

Anyhow the next morning. They [had] wrapped them up in a piece of canvas that night. They took the clothes off them, and put them in a.... Made a box for them, a big old wooden box. And put so much salt down in it. Then put them down on the salt in just the same, in the same manner as you salt the fish. And they covered them ever and hoisted them aboard the *Kyle* and shipped them home to Conception Harbour and they was buried from the church. They wasn't come home or anything like that. They was just buried from the wharf to the grave ground at Conception Harbour.

When asked if the bodies had been found immediately he described the procedure undertaken to recover the bodies.

[The *Kyle*] turned back and went into a place called Brigus again.<sup>263</sup> Mosey Lewis, Pad Lewis, George Dalton from Conception Harbour went out in a boat looking for them. Set their trawl [you know what a trawl is?] with the hooks on it. George Dalton said "We'll light a candle anyway and put it in the stem [bow] of the boat."

And they lit the candle and put it in the stem of the boat. And Mose Lewis was jigging with the jigger and he struck something. He said "I got one of them anyway", he said. Haul him up now. "I can't do it. I can't heave him up." He said, "He's on the jigger just the same." Dalton hauled him up. When he seen him coming, George had him jigged by the boat and took

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<sup>263</sup> Newspaper accounts state that the *Kyle* was stormbound at Comfort Bight October 23. October 27 was in St. Anthony. Arrived St. John's the evening of October 31st after landing 370 fishermen at various Conception Bay communities.



him in. About seven or eight feet, say fifteen or eighteen feet up from that they started trawling and hooked me father.

I don't know whether they blowed out the candle or the candle went out. They were talking about it. I don't know which but there was something about the candle. [Here Mr. Walsh paused for a moment seemingly remembering that night.]

Uncle Jim Doyle, your grandfather, was in the boat too looking for the bodies. He was out once or twice. I heard him talking about that.

Definitely they were all there. There must have been twenty-five or thirty when they was dressing up the bodies in the shoal. I don't know how many they were. I don't know just who they were. They was an awful mess anyhow. But everybody knew them I suppose that was staying there. Just the same as you go to a wake now, eh Jake?

Yes, my dear child, I guarantee it was a hard night though. Very hard night. That was October (1932).

He concluded the story by asking about my father's version of the story. "Now was it close to what I'm telling you?" he asked.<sup>264</sup>

In this narrative told 53 years after the event took place, Mr. Walsh sets the scene, then follows the process from the drowning on the Labrador to the burial in Newfoundland. I had literally walked in off the road to ask him about his experiences on the Labrador. I had been talking to Chris Cullen's son who couldn't remember what year the drowning took place. Mr. Walsh set the time in October of 1932 and went on to tell me about being on the Labrador. When I asked if he had been down on the Labrador the year his father's boat swamped, he proceeded to tell me the story knowing that I had heard it told in part or in whole by four other people. I asked only one question throughout the narrative: Had the bodies been found immediately? The question sparked

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<sup>264</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8635.

off the description of jigging for the bodies. My presence there reminded him that my grandfather had been one of the men jigging for the body. In his narrative he had mentioned only the Conception Harbour men.

The narrative shows how the normal network of support available in the home communities came into play as soon as death occurred. Immediately the “neighbours” started the search for the bodies. The customary “sorry for your troubles” was extended to Mr. Walsh when it became apparent that he was one of the bereaved. The belief system provided a mechanism for locating the body apart from the practical methods of dragging with a trawl and jigging with a jigger. Another informant also described the use of the candle but credited Mike Gushue with finding the body. According to another informant, it was Mike Gushue who cut up a candle and said a prayer and the candle stopped over the body.<sup>265</sup> The fishermen also followed the customary practice of inviting the souls of the drowned fishermen to come aboard for the trip home to Newfoundland. Seemingly, in this case, the souls stayed in their boat until they were invited aboard. In another case, the invitation to come aboard was answered by the stern of the boat being pushed down momentarily as if someone had actually stepped into the boat.<sup>266</sup>

Once the bodies were recovered the normal practice of covering the body until it could be washed and dressed was followed. Meanwhile a box was made or obtained. Because the trip home could take three days or three weeks, salt was used to preserve the

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<sup>265</sup> MUNFLA, 86-013, C8682

<sup>266</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8688.

body for the final voyage.<sup>267</sup> The body was kept on deck and stories are told of using the makeshift coffin as a card table on the return voyage. Its presence supposedly did not completely darken the mood of those returning home after a good summer.

No song was composed to commemorate the drowning of these two men, perhaps because they had been foolish to go out on a rough sea in an overloaded boat. Similarly, to my knowledge, no song exists to mark the loss of a vessel and nine lives from Colliers in 1857, previously mentioned. Only the direct descendants of the owner of the vessel have preserved the story. The incident was seldom mentioned within the family, probably because as one member speculated:

“I suppose he felt bad about the eleven lives lost.” Although two, if not three, of my ancestors perished on that vessel, there is no mention of it in family tradition.

Sometimes tragedy could be averted by the sharing between Labradorians and Newfoundlanders of psychic experiences. George narrated a story his father had told him about seeing one Sunday evening a phantom schooner that no one else had seen.

So anyway he was sat down in the window the next Sunday evening and he seen the same schooner coming through the Tickle. He went out to Uncle Albert and told him, “There’s the schooner now I seen last Sunday coming through the Tickle.” The schooner came in and anchored. The skipper and two or three more of them came ashore. And my father said to them: “Did you pass through the Ice Ticks here last Sunday?” The skipper said, “No, I never came through here. I came on up now”. My father told him, “I saw your schooner come through here last Sunday evening handy about the same time.” “Well,” he said, “I dare say you did. The night before I left home, my mother saw me stood up to her bedside with my oilcloths on. So for the reason that you saw me come through last Sunday and my mother saw me before - I was intending to go home straight. I’m going to turn to shore. I’m not going to leave [sight of land]

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<sup>267</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 84-218.



and when I gets home - if I get home - you'll hear from me." So anyway, that Fall on the last boat come down my father had a barrel of clothes [delivered to him]. He had a letter from the man saying that his schooner had sprung a leak and he had lost everything he had. But there wasn't any lives lost. So the Newfoundland skipper thanked him and said that between him, my father, and his mother that was what saved his life and his crew. Now that's the story my father was telling me, you know. It was a warning I suppose eh, you know.<sup>268</sup>

Thus it was that a Newfoundland fisherman, by heeding the precognitive warnings of his mother and the Labrador man, exercised caution and made the trip safely home. It should be noted here that the clothing was scarce on the Labrador and therefore used as payment or for barter.

On the schooners that made the trip safely, the women would knit and the men would tell stories and drink berry-hackie, a hot drink made from a gallon of berries and sugar boiled in a kettle and strained.<sup>269</sup> Upon safe arrival home, families and friends would be reunited, the fish sold, accounts settled, the winter's diet (provisions) purchased, and normal life resumed. The arrival back was not without tradition:

It was customary at Brigus for people who did not go to the Labrador to shake hands with us and welcome us home. We went through separation from friends and relatives and neighbours and after four months we were glad to be incorporated into the scheme of things once more.<sup>270</sup>

Thus the Labrador fishermen disbanded and regrouped in other groups until the following year when they would again make preparations to prosecute the Labrador fishery.

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<sup>268</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8675.

<sup>269</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-400, p. 30. There is no mention made of this drink in Colliers but the Colliers men did make moonshine.

<sup>270</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 71-103, pg. 19. Tom Doyle mentioned that people would gather in Conception Harbour to meet the boat.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

This study represents the attempt to fill a void in Newfoundland folklore studies by documenting the effects of the Labrador fishery on the folklife of a Newfoundland community. It has taken a step towards recording some of the oral folk history that relates to that community and the Labrador fishery in general. What has been collected here, in summary, are brief life stories of men and women involved in the Labrador fishery and the common denominators of the experience of going on the Labrador: going in collar, the passage down, work activities while fishing, social activities on the Labrador, and the return passage. Each of these common denominators is worthy of further study as are other aspects the thesis describes, such as the role of women in the folklife of the fishery, sexuality, pranks and tricks, conflict, and cooperation.

This report contains a portion of the material gathered regarding participation of Colliers people in the migratory fishery. This amount of information alone suggests that the Labrador fishery played an important role in the folklife of the community of Colliers, despite the fact that the fishery was carried out away from the geographical setting of the community itself.

The narratives of these Labrador fishermen touch upon concerns which affect all migrant workers: recruitment, transportation, working conditions, food and accommodations, power and status. Time is not measured by the calendar but by events,

such as the passage down and the actual fishing season itself. The emic importance of the events themselves is reinforced by the seasonal return to the same setting to fish yearly.

The reminiscences build up a picture of life in Colliers and life on the Labrador. The stories of the Labrador are told in small settings usually among family members and visiting members of the group. Interviewing the people was similar to a family gathering where most of the informants remembered some points but others could add little bits long forgotten or not known by another party. Memories are often rekindled by the deaths of the participants and by the continual participation of some families, the Coles and the Whelans, in the fishery.

An example may be seen in the following narrative. It illustrates how the Labrador had a major influence on some families in Colliers. My grandmother had been conceived out of wedlock on the Labrador in a relationship with a married man. Only two of her five daughters (my mother, C.D. and aunt, N.S.) knew about it and they had heard the story from other people. In my aunt's case, it was told to her by her brother-in-law, a Bell Island man who had heard it from a man living in the Ridge area of Colliers.

C.D.: Mom was born in 1873. The next year her mother went to the Labrador and she never came back. Got married in the year (to someone from) Brent's Cove. He was down on the Labrador.

They came up after. Herself and her daughter and poor Mom went down the harbour (to visit with them) Maude was her name, her sister. She didn't want none of the family to know. People told me. She was married then.

N.S.: Do you think I should tell [my daughter] Bride? Angela didn't know or Clara (Nell's sisters).

C.D.: Gen Dinn told me.



N.S.: Clara [Griffin] asked Kitty McCarthy but she wouldn't tell her. Mike Whelan in around the road told [my brother-in-law] Tom Stoyles about Mom [and he taunted me with the information].<sup>271</sup>

The true nature of my grandmother's conception would have been known to the Colliers people fishing on the Labrador in 1872, but the information was not generally known in Colliers, even among her closest relatives. At least one Colliers woman is acknowledged as having had a baby delivered on the Labrador.

Because of the young starting age of the participants in the fishery, many of the narratives center on pranks and interaction with the opposite sex. Their narratives identify the principal families who participated in the Labrador fishery and those that went with them. The important characteristics of a Labrador "fisherman" and "girl" come out in the stories. Men must be strong, agile, dependable, good at fishing, and good sports. Women must be good cooks, capable to help at fishing when necessary, and good sports.

The process of remembering Colliers' participation in the Labrador fishery is best described by Tamara Hareven's term "generational memory":

By comparison to other cultures, for most Americans generational memory spans a relatively brief period. The term generational memory is employed here broadly to encompass the memories which individuals have of their own families' history, as well as more general collective memories about the past. Most people do not even remember, or never knew, their grandfathers' occupation or place of birth. For a small proportion of the American population memory reaches back to the American Revolution, or to pre-Mayflower England or Europe. For descendants of later immigrations, memory extends mostly to the first generation in America, or, in fewer instances, to the last generation in the "old country." A sense of history does not depend on the depth of

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<sup>271</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8683. This is also an example of prohibitive zones in families. See Harevan, p. 255. "Poor" is used to denote people who are dead.

generational memory, but identity and consciousness do, because they rest on the linkage of the individual's life history and family history with specific historical moments.<sup>272</sup>

Hareven analyzes the recent use of oral history for the purpose of firing a collective historical consciousness through the discovery of a common past.<sup>273</sup> In this case, the common past (*i.e.*, participating in the Labrador fishery) fired collective consciousness of how lives were intertwined historically through participating in the fishery. The generational memory could stretch back over 130 years in some cases.

Such an expansive generational memory may be due to continuity of occupation in fishing families and the socialization involved. Orvar Lofgren listed the stages through which the Swedish boys drifted into the occupational role of fishermen from helping their parents at an early age to prepare equipment, to young boys messing around in boats and listening for hours to the small talk that flowed between fishermen in their free time.<sup>274</sup> This pattern of maritime socialization based upon observation and imitation over long periods of time rather than actual instruction and formal teaching was as typical in Newfoundland and Labrador as in European fishing communities. Here also, play was strongly integrated in the learning of maritime skills as children jigged fish off the wharf and learned to row the boats in shallow waters close to the shore. While it is true that some aspects of technology in the fishery have changed, many of the techniques of the

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<sup>272</sup> Tamara Hareven, "The Search for Generational Memory," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), p. 249.

<sup>273</sup> Hareven, p. 253.

<sup>274</sup> Lofgren, p. 284.

occupation and the hazards and work conditions have not. Such similarities make the applications of personal narratives of one generation easily appreciable by the next generation.

For example, Theodore Cole, who fished on the Labrador in the 1970s, told how his brother nearly drowned. This story was told in the presence of his wife, whose grandfather, Chris Cullen, did drown on the Labrador (*q. v.*, Chapter 5). Theodore himself had gone astray in the fog in Labrador.<sup>275</sup>

The narratives also seem to serve the purpose of recruiting new workers for the fishery. There are three main groups in Colliers who went to the Labrador: those who applied to go, these who were recruited from outside the family, and these who went along with their families. The people who asked to go appear to have been exposed to others talking of their experiences on the Labrador. My father told me he had pestered his father for three years to take him on the Labrador until he was finally taken at age eleven. His cousin Tom also told me he wanted to go because his father went. His sister Alice expressed it best of all:

Jim used to be telling me about the Labrador. Father didn't want me to go to the Labrador but I wanted to see it. They couldn't get either girl so I said I would go. He wanted me to stay home. Jim and Father would always be talking about the Labrador. My brother only nine or ten when he went to the Labrador. You heard him talking about it sure. I stayed here until I get up to be seventeen or eighteen, then I went down to the Labrador.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8696. The story of Mrs. Cole's grandfather is found on MUNFLA 86-013, C8635.

<sup>276</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8634.



Another important aspect of the narratives may be noted. There is a difference in emphasis between the oral and written records of the Labrador fishery. As mentioned in Chapter 1, emic and etic perspectives of any occupation illustrate a wide gulf between the viewpoints. Historians, economists, cultural geographers, social workers, union organizers, or various government officers concentrate upon socioeconomic issues of occupations, yet the principals involved in the Labrador fishery stress interpersonal aspects of the fishery. Officials, such as Wornell,<sup>277</sup> seem to indicate a more confrontational environment than that illustrated by the interviews. This differentiation further illustrates that "historical truth" is dependent upon the viewpoint of the observer and an eclectic approach is necessary for the study of any occupational group.

The Labrador fishery served to establish a sense of group identity for those in the community who had participated. These who had gone on the Labrador considered themselves very much a group, which was often demonstrated for me through the presence of my father at interviews or when informants told stories about him. The first time my father was present in an interview was when Tom Walsh set the price of the interview with him as a bottle of rum and the presence of my father. While undoubtedly it was one of the best interviews, the tape is almost impossible to decipher in places. However, the interview demonstrated that the presence of family members and members of the group helped the information to flow. The interaction between Tom and his family

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<sup>277</sup> Magistrate E. J. Wornell Collection, PANL, P4/16.

and my father demonstrated that the Labrador fishery was a familiar topic of conversation for them.<sup>278</sup>

Tom also recommended that I visit a man he had fished with, Pad Gushue, a floater fisherman from Bacon Cove now living in Holyrood. To save time and to help locate the correct address, I took Dad with me to visit Mr. Gushue. One story they told between them was of a man who was convicted of stealing a vessel to come home. It was the judge's phrase "he should have gotten a medal instead of thirty days for coming from the Labrador without a compass" and the fisherman's response of "That's right, your hacket" which keep the story alive for them.<sup>279</sup> In the third and final interview done in Bacon Cove at the lower end of Conception Harbour in the presence of my father, he confirmed for me that going on the Labrador was a rite of passage for him the same as his first shave, his first drunk, and passing for a man to buy liquor. The proximity of the departure point and the presence of another participant stirred the memories and the resulting string of narratives confirmed that it was an experience that was stored in his inactive repertoire.<sup>280</sup>

The sense of group identity mentioned above is also present with the women. I worked for a short time in my sister's club in Colliers. One Saturday night a woman from Conception Harbour who knew I was studying the Labrador fishery said "I bet you don't know everything about what your father was up to on the Labrador?" "Probably not", I

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<sup>278</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8691.

<sup>279</sup> MUNFLA86-013,C8632.

<sup>280</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8697.

said, "and I always looking for new stories but if you mean do I knew he was seeing other women besides my mother, he told me he did." She was very impressed that I had been given that information, usually reserved for the actual participants in the fishery. Ann Grace recalled how my father, who had grown up on the Labrador, never missed an opportunity to point out that they had been on the Labrador together.

Sure he sticks up [beside me] when I'm down to Father Terry's or (any place) and gets me over on side of him [to show how much taller he is than me and he would say] "She was a well growed woman and I was a little fella (when we were on the Labrador). I said, "Yes, and many's a time I had a smack at you, too."<sup>281</sup>

The "group" also consisted of a large proportion of the community. Master Lar Whelan, a retired schoolteacher, recalls:

Practically all our people went. [The] principal families DoYLES, Whelans, Burkes [went] to mostly around Smokey, Splitting Knife, and Cut Throat. [The] DoYLES - James, Patrick and Ned - went in the early days. MacDonalds had a little schooner. Nearly four fifths of the population would be gone. Average family between seven and ten.<sup>282</sup>

To explain the expression "everyone went on the Labrador," my father stated that for every Colliers family name in the telephone directory at least one to three family members went on the Labrador at some time or another.

Why did the fishery have such extensive cultural effects on the community? A major reason may have been that the fishery played an important part within the

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<sup>281</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8684.

<sup>282</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8688.



community economy. Migration has been seen as a response to economic demands<sup>283</sup> and the economic aspects have had to the expression of the fishery in the folklife of the community despite low earnings and frequent lean years.

Considering that more than one quarter of the year was spent prosecuting the Labrador fishery, the direct cash benefits were quite small and at some times, there were no cash earnings after expenses were paid. Paddy (Fly) McGrath left the fishery due to the low wages.<sup>284</sup> But, other economic advantages were available through the fishery, as seen in the story of Captain Matt Whelan, where although the crew earned only \$14.50 each for the summer, they each secured two quintals of fish, “enough to keep a family going all winter.”<sup>285</sup> George Cole referred to getting a share of three quintals, raising cash through the sale of one or two quintals and keeping one for himself.<sup>286</sup> Women’s wages from employment, while low, further contributed to family income.

It should be considered that, during the time period in question, the community economy was not extensively cash based. Subsistence farming contributed to family income by direct means of growing food, rather than the cash purchase of foodstuffs. Bakeapples and smoked salmon, along with the winter fish brought back from the Labrador, increased the family’s winter food stocks. Therefore, while direct cash income incentive from the Labrador fishery may have been low, the incentive of augmenting feed sources through the harvesting of fish and other resources was quite high, whether or not

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<sup>283</sup> Lee, p. 288-89.

<sup>284</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8693. See Chapter 5.

<sup>285</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8700.

<sup>286</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8689. See Chapter 3.

this was perceived in this manner by members of the community. This may have been made even more attractive by the absence of any other seasonal activity during this time:

There was nothin' else to do, only fish. I mean, that's all there was to do. T'was a matter of surviving. You had to go to the fishery and that was combined with gardening and logging in the winter and that would supplement your earnings for the year.<sup>287</sup>

In this way, the annual migration to Labrador to fish can be seen as an important component in the economic matrix. This importance was transferred to the social aspects of the culture making itself evident within the folklife of the community of Colliers through song, story, and group identification.

Another factor which contributed to the importance of the Labrador fishery in rich cultural expression was the participation of both men and women. The men outnumbered the women five to one. Because the men traditionally started at around age twelve and the women at age eleven to fifteen depending on whether or not they were cooking for their own families, they literally grew up on the Labrador, as is noted in my father's narratives in the previous chapters.

As summarized by Ravenstein (see Chapter 1), those who participated in the Labrador fishery proceeded a short distance in response to an economic demand for fish. There was a significant role played by women. While there was a demand for fish and fish to supply the demand, there was also a reserve army of skilled workers who learned their trade by living the fishing and the related tasks which basically had not changed

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<sup>287</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 79-256, p. 8.

much during the period of my study and is captured in Herman Moll's illustration (Figure 4).

"Skill" was learned traditionally from generation to generation through observation and imitation. It was reinforced through songs, stories, practical jokes and practice, practice, practice. As stated in Chapter 1, economy and technology are the dominant factors in migration, which then follow certain patterns for the distance and the type of people moving. Seldom, indeed, in the history of labour has the reserve army of skilled or unskilled workers been given preferential treatment. This is as true in 2009 as it was in the time of my father's trips to the Labrador and even of my own on the northern end of my trip when the vessel was overcrowded. However, Newfoundland migrant fishermen and families were unlike perpetual migrants for one main reason; they moved as a part of living, not as a means of living. Because of the folklore being constantly brought home to the community and shared on the voyage down, newcomers were prepared for the initiation into the rites of passage that made the transition from outsider to insider. You can read about the Labrador fishery, even take a cruise on the Labrador Sea, but unless you have spent time living the life, you have not been "on the Labrador," as have the people whose experiences I have recorded here in part.

### **Final Comments**

This is by no means a finished project. The experience of living in the community for sixteen years and following the fishery for three weeks opened my eyes to the richness of the material but left me with more questions than answers. The majority of narratives in MUNFLA comes from Conception Bay, the capital of the stationer fishery as



can be evidenced in the Stationers Festival held in Carbonear since 1987 and the Price of Fish Exhibit put together by four Conception Bay communities in 1991.<sup>288</sup> The Labrador fishery from the floaters' point of view has yet to be compiled.

The Labrador fishery is no longer and probably never was the dominating social, economic, or cultural focus of community of Colliers. Now, as then, it is only one aspect which unites the community. The earlier, relatively homogenous maritime culture has given way to cultural pluralism and economic differentiation. However, up to 1948, it was a tie that bound families and communities together for the four-month annual seasonal migration.

These brief summaries of people's voyages to and experiences on the Labrador exemplify the dangers and the hardships that these people faced year after year along with the ordinary times, like Mrs. B.'s description of mat hooking.<sup>289</sup> People continued to go on the Labrador and still do.

In the late 1800s, the Colliers' families were predominantly fishing families involved in subsistence farming, seal fishery, and any work available in the off-cod-fishing season. Starting in the 1800s, they gradually involved themselves in occupational pluralism and flexible career patterns following the fluctuations in fishing and the local labour markets. Most of them had some maritime education. When new economic opportunities emerged after the second world war, some sons of fishermen never became

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<sup>288</sup> The exhibit, The Price of Fish, Community Life and the Fisheries, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, was organized by the Brigus Historical and Conservation Society, Carbonear Heritage Society, Port de Grave Fishermen's Museum, and the Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, circulated by the Newfoundland Museum.

<sup>289</sup> MUNFLA, ms., 80-091, p. 12. See Chapter 4.

fishermen. Other long term fishermen, now married and with growing families, left the fishery for wage employment. Some, like my father returned to the fishery again.<sup>290</sup>

The Colliers people believed that the fishery died in the 1940s. Indeed, the way of life did die. Both Tom Doyle and Jim Doyle left all their gear on the Labrador, intending to return but never making it back. When asked why he stopped going, Tom Doyle replied:

Didn't rightly know I wasn't going back. Went to Argentia and them places. One year brought on the next and I didn't go back. I got working. Bill Wade went a year or two later but he gave it up. See, it was lonesome down there with one crew. If you went out around and something happened...

I can see the place in my eyes now, every berth, every mark, and all the rest of it. Half of them going down there now knows nothing of fishing. They only goes down to have a look around. Sure, they're home again the later part of August. How are they going to get fish? There's hardly any cod traps down. Most is there is gill nets and long liners. If we had gill nets then, we would have cleaned her. Lots of big fish then.

If I had my gear there, I wouldn't mind a summer. I wouldn't mind going back this summer. I don't know but I'll go back for a trip... I love to go. I'd love to go today. No times like it. Mightn't be much money in circulation but people more happier than they are today. Lots of fresh fish on the Labrador. All the old people went to the Labrador. That's why we went back to the same place every summer after doing a bit of fishing here.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Jim Doyle fished with a friend in 1953, went squid fishing with his sons in 1960, and spent one last fishing season after his retirement from carpentry work, with a former Labrador crew member, his cousin Tom, in 1976. Therefore he spent half his working life with the fishery.

<sup>291</sup> MUNFLA 86-013, C8678.

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TDLA Ralph Barrett Collection

## APPENDIX A

### Jill's Questionnaire for the Coastal Boats

- h. How long have you worked on the coastal boats?
2. Who owned and operated the *Kyle* in the 1940s? How many crew? What was its run? What time of year did the *Kyle* operate?
3. How many other ships were operating on the Labrador coast? How keen were crews to get assigned to this run?
4. Any changes to its operation when CN took over? Were there any other service vessels operating the coast run from the 1940's on? Freight vessels, hospital vessels, mail boat?
5. When was the boat most crowded? Was it slack mid-season or was it busy with freight? If the boat was crowded, did they pick people up or did they have to wait until the next trip?
6. Did the boat deal mainly with stationers or with floaters as well? Bankers? What was the cost of tickets? Could people book ahead for sleeping accommodations or was it "first come, first served"? Where did the most sleep? How did they deal with bodies? Did the proportion of crews travelling on the coastal boats change in the 1940s? (i.e., did more people travel on the CN boats and less on private schooners?) Was the role of the coastal boat increasingly important?
7. What were the traditions of the Labrador Schooners and coastal ships? Did the conditions of the passage to Labrador improve? Were there any ceremonies for crossing the Strait of Belle Isle among either the crew or the passengers?

8. In the 1940s, were fishermen still allowed to sleep in the hold? Did the fishermen take everything they needed at the beginning of the season or did they have things sent up during the season? What sort of things/gear were taken up? Did many families accompany the men? Skippers' families or crew's families? Did stationers come mostly from Conception Bay or were there other centres? Did you notice any changes in the type of people fishing on the Labrador or in their gear or location? Did people take their boats up and down? What were the prices for freight?
9. Do the merchants still play an important role? What is the latest crews stayed on the Labrador? Did you notice any division or conflict between the Newfoundlanders and the local people? How is fish taken from the coast?
10. How important was the coastal boat to local communities? What was the main service provided to them?
11. What sort of problems were encountered? Since 1950 on, what changes? Do you see any recent changes on the Labrador coast compared to years ago? Is it going to change in the future?
12. Where do Newfoundlanders go to fish now?



## APPENDIX B

### Questionnaire

1. When did you first go to the Labrador? Why?
2. How many trips did you make?
3. Where did you go on the Labrador?
4. Who was there fishing? As merchants?
5. Who went from your community?
6. What preparations did you make?
7. Who looked after your property and family?
8. Where did you leave from?
9. What kind of send off did you get?
10. What were conditions like on the vessel?
11. What did you do to pass the time? (e.g., King Neptune. List all songs, games, stories, sayings, giving as much detail as possible.)
12. Did you have a particular name for the trip down?
13. Did you have a particular name for the boxes you used to pack your gear?
14. Did you have a particular name for the people who went on the Labrador: landsmen, planters, stationers, Labrador fishermen, floaters, sharemen, servants, girl?
15. Did you run into any difficulties on the trip down?
16. Describe the house where you lived on the Labrador.
17. Describe what you did on arrival.
18. Describe the day's work for a man, cook, children.

19. Did you have any spare time? Did you have any name for your spare time fishermen's holiday? Harbour days?
20. What did you do in you spare time?
21. What kinds of stories, dances, songs, recitations were done and by whom? (Give as much detail as possible.)
22. Did you learn any new songs, dances, etc., while on the Labrador?
23. Would you perform these songs, dances, etc., when you get back home?
24. If so, what were people's reactions to them?
25. Who visited the place where you lived (e.g., doctors, missionaries, Inuit (Eskimos), Innu (Indians), livyers, foreign sailors?)
26. How did you look after people who suffered illness, accidents, death?
27. How did you know if a storm was coming in?
28. What preparations were made?
29. Are there any stories of shipwreck? If so, please give as much detail as possible.
30. What preparations did you make for the return trip?
31. Did you bring back any gifts of bakeapples, native handicrafts? If so, to whom and how often?
32. Describe the trip back.
33. What happened to you as soon as you arrived home?
34. What work awaited you?
35. What did you tell your family/friends about the Labrador?
36. Did you talk about the Labrador over the winter months? To whom, why?

37. Did you look forward to going on the Labrador again? Why?
38. What did you like most about the Labrador fishery?
39. What did you like least about the Labrador fishery?
40. What would you tell your grandchildren about your experiences on the Labrador?
41. Did you make up any songs about the Labrador?
42. Who named the communities on the Labrador?
43. Amount and method of payment.



## Figures

Figure 4. Following Page.

An illustration from Herman Moll's map of 1710.

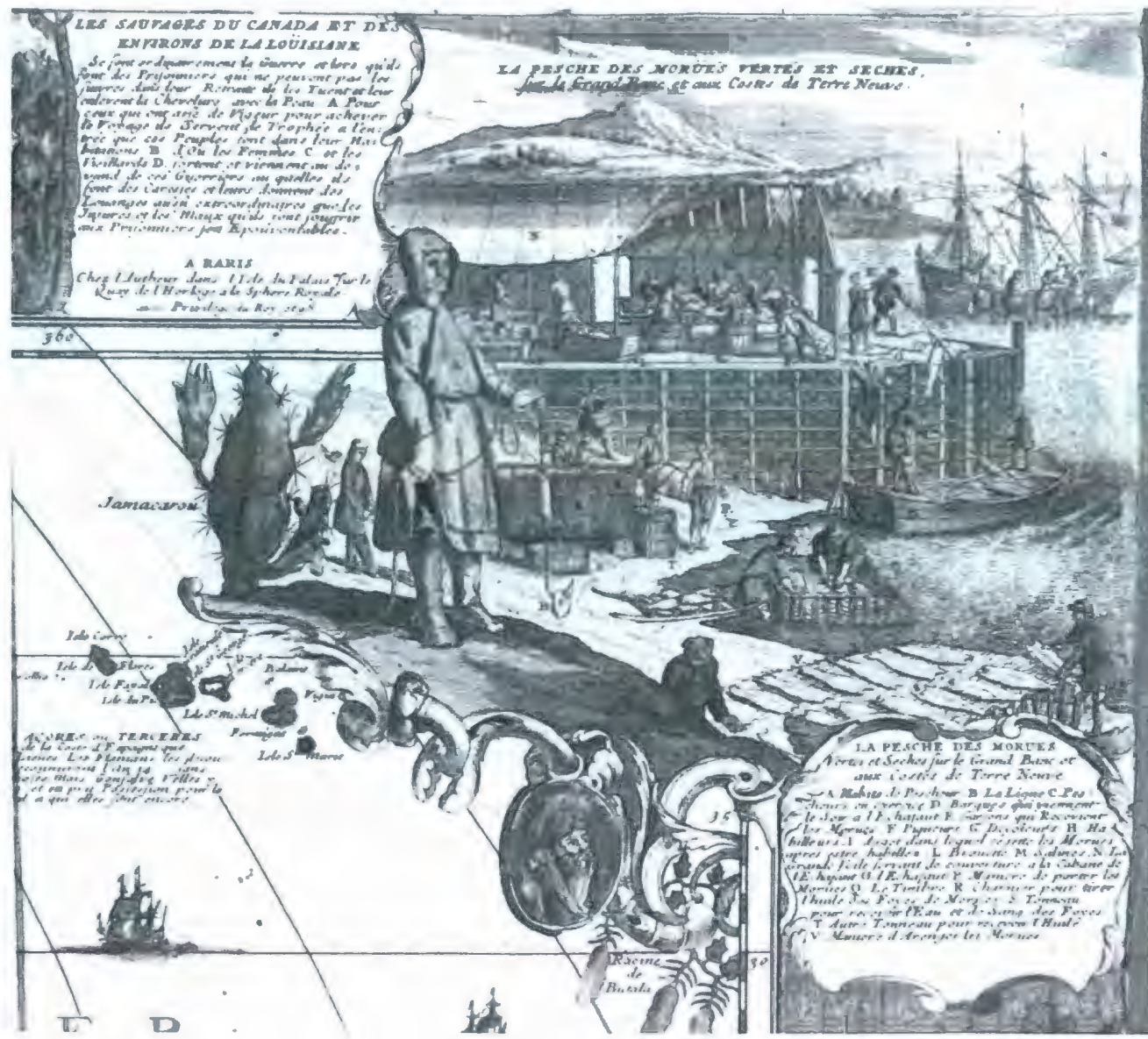


Figure 5. Following Page.

My grandfather's house, the oldest one in Colliers, with Tom Doyle's house in the background.





Figure 6. Following Page.

House located at Tickeraluck Island, Labrador, used for summer fishery.







