From Blow-Me-Down Park beach, the precipitous north face of Blow-Me-Down Mountain is seen reaching an elevation of 763 metres or 2,313 feet. The road to Corner Brook passes between the mountain and the water of the Bay. Some of the most dangerous winds in the area are experienced around the base of the mountain.

1. Why “The Forgotten Bay”?  
   The Bay of Islands was the very last part of the Island of Newfoundland to receive permanent settlement in any significant measure. When the settlers of the Avalon Peninsula began to venture further afield in search of improved fishing grounds and building materials, some of them travelled along the South Coast of the
Island, establishing themselves close to those excellent fishing areas. Then, generation by generation, as those fishing grounds became too crowded, they migrated further west, rounding Cape Ray, moving up the West Coast to Codroy, and then into Bay St George. Here they established Sandy Point, which for some time was the major port of the West Coast during the final decades of the 19th Century. Similarly, others ventured in a northeasterly direction from the Avalon Peninsula to Labrador to take advantage of the excellent fishery there, ans some settled in Labrador. Others gradually migrated southwards down the West Coast. Many of these migrations were at first seasonal and temporary, but as time passed and more people joined in, the moves became permanent. It was an obvious advantage to inshore fishermen of those times, who operated from dories or similar small boats using oars or sometimes sails for propulsion, to locate their homes close to their fishing grounds, since travel was slow, laborious, and frequently dangerous. The two migration routes, clockwise and counterclockwise, thus converged at the Bay of Islands, finally completing the settlement of the Island’s coastline. Those settlers, or livyers 1, often young couples with as yet few or no children, would establish themselves at the headwaters of a bay or cove, like Birchy Cove, or in the estuary of a river such as the Humber. There they could be reasonably safe from the view of the French navy, and from the depredations of marauding privateers who were not uncommon around the coasts, especially the West Coast, in those days. Yet at the same time they had found an abundance of lumber, fresh and saltwater fish, and good hunting. Later, as risk of privateers and harassment by the French declined and it became more obvious that Newfoundland was destined to belong to those who lived there, younger generations of those same first livyers moved to the outer areas of the Bay and eventually formed permanent settlements there. However this did not happen for many years and was fairly tenuous until 1904 when the French Shore issue was finally terminated in the Entente Cordiale, a formal settlement between Britain and France. 2

The outer regions of the Bay were the last parts to be permanently occupied. Settlement at Lark Harbour began around 1850, and York Harbour around 1890, making them among the very last areas of Newfoundland and also of the Bay of Islands to be settled by significant numbers. There had been scattered individuals who had lived quite solitary lives around the Bay even before James Cook’s visit a century earlier. But as people discovered how good a living could be made, particularly in the herring and

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1 Livyer - A permanent settler of coastal Newfoundland (as opposed to migratory fishermen from England). Dictionary of Newfoundland English. Derivation may be from two words “live here”.

2 The area was popular with privateers because of the lack of supervision from either the British or the French navies, who concentrated most of their efforts on the eastern side of the Island. Indeed, on some occasions the West Coast actually experienced harassment, rather than protection, from the British Royal Navy who were under orders from London to enforce the Treaties of Paris and Versailles. Chapter 4 will discuss the reasons for this.
lobster fisheries of the outer or western areas of the Bay, they migrated there in increasing numbers. The settlements grew, but the colonial government whose hands were tied by the Treaties of Utrecht (1713), Paris (1763) and Versailles (1783), remained focused on St John’s. The Treaties prevented formal civic organisation on the West Coast, and it suited the British to allow this state of affairs to continue virtually until 1904. The only significant social infrastructure until then was provided by the churches, which became well established on the West Coast as on the East Coast by this time. Largely due to the excellent dedication of a few individual clergy who committed themselves, often for many years, to a life of hardship and service in an area where few others were prepared to go, the efforts of these men were instrumental in improving the lives of their parishioners. The Outer Bay of Islands owes much to its churches.

2. Geology and Scenery of the Bay of Islands

Geologically, the West Coast of Newfoundland is one of the most interesting areas to be found anywhere. Much of it is formed from rocks which originated deep in the earth’s crust and were raised to the surface during volcanic and orogenic events more than 500 million years ago. At the entrance to Bottle Cove may be seen examples of igneous pillow lava from this volcanic activity, and the surrounding rocks are often a confusing mixture of igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary layers resulting from tectonic movements when the Americas, Africa, and Europe were separating and creating new seas and oceans. Geologists believe that a super-continent, called Pangaea, composed of all the present continents, began to separate into smaller parts about 650 million years ago, with the Americas forming one section and Eurasia and Africa the other. Between the two huge land masses was formed the Iapetus Ocean. After more millions of years, this ocean began to narrow again until the land masses eventually collided, throwing up mountain ranges of which the Appalachians were a part. The Long Range Mountains which parallel the West Coast of Newfoundland are a part of this Appalachian orogenesis which extends southwards into Georgia.

Gros Morne National Park and the Bay of Islands region are geologically quite similar, their rocks both consisting of large quantities of peridotite, a mineral rich in iron that weathers to a brilliant orange. It can support very little life, either plant or animal. Thrust upwards from the earth’s mantle several kilometres below the crust, peridotite forms the high plateau of the Tablelands east of the highway between WoodyPoint and Trout River, and also much of the Blow-Me-Down Mountain Range which contains the Cabox, the Island’s highest mountain with an elevation of more than 800 metres south of Highway 450. The dramatic

3 Pronounced “Pan-JEE-a”, meaning “all of the earth”.
The Blow-Me-Down Mountains south of Highway 450 from the Day Park. Note the reddish plateau in the distance.

View of Lark Harbour from The Tortoise mountain at the eastern end of Blow-Me-Down Park trail.
orange colour of the Tablelands is easily visible to the north across the Bay on a clear sunny day. These geological features are sufficiently rare that Gros Morne Park was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.

During the last Ice Age which finished about 10,000 years ago, the entire Bay of Islands area was heavily glaciated, and now yields many prime examples of features such as cirques, hogback ridges, and deep striations. Marine charts show that as a result of scouring by ice, the seabed within the Bay is often much deeper in some places than that of the Gulf of St Lawrence immediately outside the Bay where less scouring occurred. The shores exhibit numerous raised beach areas formed at the foot of the mountains from eroded materials deposited on the seabed and later elevated above sea level. It was frequently along these beaches that the first European settlers located their homes.

From the Gulf of St Lawrence a ship will first enter a wide bay some fifteen kilometres from north to south, surrounded by steep, sometimes vertical, cliffs backed by mountains up to eight hundred metres high. As the name ‘Bay of Islands’ suggests, the Bay contains a number of islands, some as rocky and forbidding as the surrounding cliffs, while others are low and wooded. Some fifteen kilometres inland to the east are deep fiords extending yet another thirty kilometres into Newfoundland’s Central Plateau. The modern City of Corner Brook, founded about 1925, is at the head of one such fiord, the Humber Arm.

3. Economic Factors: Past, Present and Future

Just within the Bay of Islands, on the south side, is a narrow channel perhaps half a kilometre wide which trends westward between steep cliffs backed by mountains until at last it opens into a roughly circular anchorage enclosed with shelving beaches. On the shores of this little haven is situated the small town of Lark Harbour. This was the site chosen by some of those first inhabitants, who found an ample supply of timber for the construction of homes and boats, water for domestic use and the preparation of fish, and a landlocked harbour providing shelter for their small boats and fishing stages. A couple of kilometres further south as the crow flies, reached now either by road through a mountain pass, or by water around a great domed headland, lies the smaller town of York Harbour, behind a long sandy beach backed by a lagoon and a gentle slope covered with spruce and birch trees, and flat land quite suitable for agriculture. On a summer day, with the sun shining and a light breeze blowing, with the hum of a motor boat heading out of the harbour and the calls of seagulls as they circle the wharf, there are few more beautiful places on earth than these two little towns. By contrast, in winter, in a whirling southeaster laden with snow and rain from the Atlantic, or when a northwest gale roars in from the Gulf, few places more effectively illustrate the tenuous nature of human life.
Recently, reality has taken a cruel twist. Where once the sea provided a bounteous yield of some of the best food nature has to offer, the last few years have seen an unprecedented decline in the fishery. There are still fishermen operating from these towns, but where only a few years ago there were dozens of dories going out every day that weather permitted, bringing in full ladings of cod, herring, mackerel, lobster, and more recently crab, a visit to the slipways at Bottle Cove or the wharves at Lark Harbour, Little Port, and York Harbour will reveal too many idled fishing boats and deserted stages. Many of the fishermen traded in their licences in the moratorium years of the 1990s and are now retired or have left for work on the mainland in places like Toronto and Sudbury, Ontario, Fort McMurray, Alberta, and other points west. What is even worse, the young people understandably see no future in the honourable industry their forefathers began here, and they leave, in most cases to return only for family visits. The result is that homes stand empty in these towns, and the school, which in the early 1980s had 350 students, by 2005 had fewer than 150 in its 13 grades from Kindergarten to Senior High Level III.

This has been the history in these parts for decades now, and no relief seems to be in sight. The facts are typical of outport Newfoundland. Enterprising fishermen and their families who have chosen so far to remain in their native communities have had to turn to alternative sources of income. Some have turned to providing boat tours for summer visitors or to guiding visiting hunters and anglers; others have opened their homes as bed-and-breakfast accommodations for those same visitors, and yet others have turned to production of handicrafts to sell to the tourists. The Humber Valley with its nationally-acclaimed downhill skiing resort at Marble Mountain brings in numbers of skiers in the winter months. But in an isolated area where transportation is expensive and time-consuming, tourism will always be limited. Some people have now found employment in the Grand Banks offshore oil industry, others in the mines of Labrador, and yet others to more distant locations in western provinces. All of these necessitate prolonged periods away from home, or complete relocation. Consequently, For Sale signs and homes boarded up are common sights, and property habitually changes hands very cheaply while prices have become exorbitant in Eastern

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4 In 1992 the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans of the Government of Canada declared a moratorium on fishing for cod. Fishermen who qualified were able to take advantage of a licence buy-back which allowed them to retire. Others were offered training programs in various trades, but those who trained in these programs were frequently no more successful in finding employment even after proper completion of their courses, and usually had to leave home to find work. There are examples of small communities ending up with six hairdressers and enough plumbers and electricians to fill a small town! Unfortunately problems of this kind have destroyed much of the natural economy of rural Newfoundland, so that small communities have suffered unprecedented depopulation. The average age of Newfoundlanders remaining on the Island has increased alarmingly due to the outmigration of so many of the younger generation, while schools in some rural areas have seen their enrolment reduced to less than half since the moratorium.

5 “The best downhill skiing east of the Rockies” - statement by Nancy Greene-Raine, Canadian ski champion.
Newfoundland, especially on the Avalon Peninsula. Under these circumstances, the question is posed: *How long can rural Newfoundland survive?*

In 1985 a visitor from the state of Illinois is said to have described the Bay of Islands as “a little bit of Switzerland right here in Canada”.  Although this description may be true in many respects, it ignores the most important fact of life in these communities: while Switzerland is entirely landlocked, Lark Harbour and York Harbour owe their very existence to the ocean. The first settlers came here because they made a living from the sea; some of their descendants still do. There have been times when the sea has been generous to them, and there have been other times when it was violent and destructive. But, regardless of its mood, and through every season of the year, for those who live as close to it as do so many Newfoundlanders, the sea is never out of sight or out of mind.

And those Newfoundlanders who have of necessity relocated to cities where they found employment in factories, mines, and offices where the sea is hundreds of miles away, for them it will for ever be their natural heritage.

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**Poem by Robert Hayman**

1575–1629

The Aire, in Newfound-Land is wholesome good;
The Fire, as sweet as any made of wood;
The Waters, very rich, both salt and fresh;
The Earth more rich, you know it is no less.
Where all are good, Fire, Water, Earth, and Aire,
What man made of these foure would not live there?

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1. Terra Incognita

The above words are found on a French map of Newfoundland dating from 1764, the year in which James Cook began his detailed survey of the coasts and harbours of our Island. Early Maps of Newfoundland, by Fabian O’Dea; in Smallwood, J R (ed): The Book of Newfoundland, vol 3, p242. Newfoundland Book Publishers (1967) Ltd, St John’s, Newfoundland, 1967. The history of the entire West Coast of Newfoundland has been, like its human settlement, sparse and uncertain, with the Bay of Islands being demonstrably the most uncertain of all. While the Avalon Peninsula had become a focal point of the Age of Exploration, a few hundred miles away to the west everything continued as it had done from time immemorial. From the early 1500s mariners had been sailing all around the Island of Newfoundland en route to and from the St Lawrence River. But except for a few fishing expeditions and the odd intrepid explorer, rarely did anyone visit the West Coast, and even more rarely did any of them enter the Bay of Islands, so that when the maps show terra incognita they reflect the true state of knowledge at the time.

2. Early Inhabitants

Only in very recent years have traces of occupation by prehistoric aboriginal peoples been uncovered. Archaeologists have however discovered five sites in the Outer Bay of Islands which may represent evidence of Maritime Archaic occupation dating somewhere between about 3000 and 1200 BC. These aboriginal people inhabited the area from New England to central Labrador after about 6000 BC, and are known to have temporarily occupied parts of Western Newfoundland. One of the best-known sites representing the Maritime Archaic culture in eastern North America is a large cemetery at Port au Choix, some 200 kilometres

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7 Translation: “The interior of this little-known Island is full of Mountains, Woods and Lakes”.


9 Translation: “unknown land”.
north of our centre of interest. This site has been explored and documented in considerable detail. But the Bay of Islands sites, though promising in the opinions of many archaeologists, have received no more than a preliminary investigation, and have to date yielded few artefacts beyond some flakes of chert, a flinty rock widely used by primitive peoples for arrows, spearheads, and cutting implements. It is not yet known whether any of these locations represent permanent occupation (as does the Port au Choix site which has been the subject of quite extensive excavation and study), transient migration, or brief hunting and foraging visits. The sites are at Little Port, Bottle Cove, the Big Brook (or Fairfax Brook) neighbourhood of Lark Harbour, Governor’s Island, and Woods Island.

Some further evidence of prehistoric activity exists in the form of a flint “point” or arrowhead found near Bottle Cove in 1974 by a local boy, Averil Childs. This item has been identified as of the Little Passage Indian culture of about 1200-1500 AD. It is a single find, and may represent nothing more than an isolated accidental loss by some forgotten band of native hunters. Additional investigation is needed in order to answer the many questions about the nature of any occupation it might represent, but it may be connected with one of several Little Passage sites that have been excavated on the South Coast.

No evidence has yet been found to suggest that the Norsemen may have visited the Bay of Islands, or even the West Coast of Newfoundland but, given their intrepid nature and mastery of the sea, it would be surprising if they had never explored westward through the Strait of Belle Isle and then perhaps southwards along the West Coast during their approximately twenty-year sojourn around 1000 AD in L’anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. Some evidence has however been found which may indicate their presence around the shores of the Gulf of St Lawrence as far as the coast of New Brunswick, and also southwards along the east coast of the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland into the Green Bay/White Bay area. Both these locations offer vast quantities of excellent timber, a material in huge demand for boat construction and in much greater proliferation than further north except perhaps for Labrador itself. The limiting factor may have been the presence of larger numbers of *skraelings*, the natives who seem to have presented a powerful disincentive to more exploration by the Norsemen. However if such claims have any validity, the Bay of Islands could also have been easily within their reach, as would Bonne Bay. Expeditions from their

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12 The name “Labrador” derives from João Fernandes Lavrador (1453-c1501), a Portuguese explorer, in 1498 the first to sight the land of Labrador. He was granted title to much of the land he had discovered. The name *Lavrador* means *farmer*. 
Vinland settlement at today’s L’Anse aux Meadows (believed to be Straumfjord, their winter base from which they may have made voyages to Hóp) into the Gulf of St Lawrence would have been comparatively simple and very rewarding in the resources that would have become available to them. Pieces of cedar and three butternuts have been found at the L’Anse aux Meadows site, which may indicate that they visited the regions where those trees grew, although they may indicate only that some trade occurred with the Aborigines. (Butternut trees are not known ever to have grown in Newfoundland.) Any really conclusive evidence of Norse visits to more southerly Newfoundland locations therefore has yet to be discovered.

Likewise no physical evidence has as yet come to light of the Micmacs residing in the Bay of Islands prior to modern times. They certainly visited this part of the Island on foraging expeditions, and established settlements in some other areas, and in 1767 James Cook reported meeting a tribe of Micmacs in Bay St George. As with the Norsemen, it is difficult to believe that these aboriginal people never spent time in the Bay of Islands, to take advantage of its comparatively sheltered waters full of herring and codfish, its ready access to the Humber River teeming with salmon, and its hinterland full of wildlife.

3. The First Modern Europeans

It is not known precisely when Europeans first began visiting the waters around Newfoundland to harvest fish, since they kept no records of their actual voyages, and few maps had been drawn at that time, although

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14 The name L’Anse au Meadows is a corruption of the French L’anse aux Méduses, which refers to the presence of méduse, the jellyfish which is often found in large numbers around these shores. The anglicisation is often misunderstood to refer to the English term “meadows” and an erroneous assumption is sometimes made that such meadows were to be found in the area.

15 McAleese, Kevin E (ed): *Full Circle: First Contact*, which suggests that Hóp may have been somewhere in eastern New Brunswick.

16 It is difficult for us to imagine that the Norsemen would not have been tempted to establish their settlement in a location more hospitable than the tip of the Northern Peninsula where exposure to the elements, even then in an era of milder climate, would have been a challenge. However we must remember that these people had come from an even harsher climate on the coast of Greenland, and to them L’Anse aux Meadows would have represented comparative comfort. Anyway, in the absence of proof to the contrary, we must assume that L’Anse aux Meadows was their only settlement.

it is fairly certain that they voyaged here before 1500. So the early European explorers were not exactly breaking new ground: they were following the uncharted routes of fishermen who had already been voyaging here for some time. The main purpose of the explorers was to establish ownership for whichever nation they represented, and thus to enable their sponsors to seize the fabled wealth of the New World.

The first documented European contact with Newfoundland in modern times was the 1497 May 02 to August 06 voyage of Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) and the little caravel *Matthew* from Bristol, in the service of King Henry VII of England. While Caboto is popularly credited with “discovering” Newfoundland, fishermen were almost certainly coming to these waters for some time before that, at least to the East Coast. It is widely believed, though not indisputably documented, that Caboto made landfall at Bonavista on Newfoundland’s East Coast, although there is no evidence that Cabot ever visited the Bay of Islands or even the West Coast.

The 1997 replica of Giovanni Caboto’s little caravel *Matthew* when she visited Lark Harbour on 1997 July 23. This visit commemorated the 500th anniversary of Cabot’s landfall at Bonavista on Newfoundland’s East Coast, although there is no evidence that Cabot ever visited the Bay of Islands or even the West Coast.

Messer Zoane Caboto ... hoisted the royal standard and took possession for the king here [Henry VII of England, who had granted him a patent for discovery in 1496] ... This Messer
Zoane has a description of the world in a map, and also a solid sphere, which he had made, and shows where he has been ... They say the land is excellent and temperate, and they believe that Brazil wood and silk are native there. They assert that the sea is swarming with fish, which can be taken not only with the net, but in baskets let down with a stone, so that it sinks in the water ... These same English, his [Caboto’s] companions, say that they could bring back so many fish that this kingdom would have no need of Iceland, from which comes a very great quantity of the fish called stock fish. 18

Another letter, written by an Englishman named John Day to the ‘Lord Grand Admiral’ of Spain (probably Columbus) who had requested information on Caboto’s voyage, describes the resources of the land:

... they found tall trees of the kind masts are made, and other smaller trees, and the country is very rich in grass ... All along the coast they found many fish like those which in Iceland are dried in the open and sold in England and other countries, and these fish are called in England ‘stockfish’ ... It is considered certain that the cape of the said land was found and discovered in the past by the great men from Bristol who found ‘Brasil’ as your Lordship well knows. It was called the Island of Brasil ... 19

In 1500 the Portuguese explorer, Gaspar Corte-Real, searching for a northwest passage to the Far East which would be shorter than the Cape of Good Hope route of Vasco da Gama, discovered “a land that is very cool and with big trees [which] he named Terra Verde”. This may have been Newfoundland. The following year, on 1501 May 15, Gaspar made a second voyage with three ships. They seem to have gone considerably further north, because, according to a letter dated 1501 October 09 from Alberto Cantino, Gaspar’s emissary to the Duke of Ferrara, “they found the sea to be frozen ... [Turning west after three months sailing] they caught sight of a very large country ... [where] numerous large rivers flowed into the sea ...” 20 Only two of the three ships returned, Gaspar’s vessel being lost on this voyage, and the next year his brother Miguel set off to find him, but also failed to return. Finally a third Corte-Real brother joined the search, and likewise found nothing. He did however return safely home. At this point the Portuguese seemed to lose interest in exploration of this region, and gave up, although their fishing in that region continued to increase. This period marks the beginning of the intense fishing effort by several European nations that was to last for

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20 If the sea was in fact frozen, it is almost certain that Gaspar Corte-Real’s ships were considerably further north than Newfoundland. Leaving Portugal in mid May, it would be June before they arrived near Newfoundland, and the date of the letter being October 09 of the same year, it seems very unlikely that the sea would then be frozen in those latitudes. It is also unlikely that the presence of icebergs, which may well have been encountered in those latitudes in summer, would elicit a statement that the sea was frozen, especially in the mornings after the weather had been calm and clear. The most plausible explanation is that they were blown off course well to the north so that they arrived off the coast of Labrador, perhaps even as far north as the Davis Strait, where the sea might conceivably still have been frozen close to the land. It is necessary also to bear in mind that Gaspar was searching for a northwest route, so he may well have aimed further north on his second voyage in order to resume where he had left off the previous year.
several hundred years. In fact, by 1506, less than ten years after the voyage of Caboto, the Portuguese fishery in Newfoundland waters was so successful that a tax was levied on all fish brought into Portugal from that area.  

4. Fish Fever

All of western Europe now wanted a piece of the action. As well as the abundant cod fishery, the fabled wealth of the new lands attracted them, and there remained a strong hope that a northwest passage was there to be discovered. So far, however, France had been the laggard in this exploration, but this would soon change. On his first voyage of 1534, Jacques Cartier was commissioned by the King of France “To discover certain islands and lands where it is said a great quantity of gold and other precious things are to be found”.  

Having passed through the Strait of Belle Isle and made his famous remark about Labrador, “the land God gave to Cain”, on 1534 June 15 Jacques Cartier set sail down the West Coast of Newfoundland. On June 17, running before a storm, he sighted the Bay of Islands and two headlands, which he called Cape Royal and Lath Cape (Cape St Gregory and South Head at the entrance to the Bay of Islands). Many of the natural features were originally named by the French, prior to the marine surveys of James Cook and his immediate predecessors, but Cartier’s voyage may have been the first authentic documented account of the Baie des Trois Iles (Bay of Islands) by a European.

Between these two capes are low shores, beyond which are very high lands with apparently rivers among them. Two leagues from Cape Royal there is a depth of twenty fathoms and the best fishing possible for big cod. Of these cod we caught, while waiting for our consort, more than a hundred in less than an hour.  

On his next voyage, Cartier circumnavigated Newfoundland, proving conclusively that it was an island, but it was still some time before the world’s cartographers incorporated that fact into their work. On that trip, as he passed through the Cabot Strait on his way back to France in the spring of 1536, off the south coast of Newfoundland Cartier encountered French fishing vessels from his home port of St Malo. The “great quantity of gold and other precious things” mentioned in his commission was, it seemed, not to be found in


23 Cumming et al, p90, from an anonymous manuscript copy, now in the Bibliothèque National, Paris, Moreau Collection, no. 841, of an original probably not by Cartier but by Jehan Poullet, who accompanied Cartier on the voyage.

24 See further discussion of this topic in Chapter 3.
this part of the new world, at least not in the form his patron had hoped for, although fishermen from St Malo, Bristol, and many other ports of western Europe continued sailing to Newfoundland in ever increasing numbers each spring for the next four hundred years, always to return home in the fall with vast amounts of another form of wealth.

Thus was laid a foundation of prosperity for the nations that exploited the resource. It lasted into the Twentieth Century and incidentally fuelled major disputes between the leading maritime nations, England and France. The value of fish taken from the waters around Newfoundland would amount to billions of dollars by today’s standards. Most of the wealth ended up in the hands of the powerful owners who ran the fishery, with very little going into the hands of those who did the hard and dangerous work that created the wealth. It should have made Newfoundland one of the wealthiest colonies of the New World, but restrictive policy decisions endured through several centuries before they were removed in 1904. Thus, in contrast with the Maritime Provinces and Québec, which all had large numbers of prosperous settlers by 1700, Newfoundland remained an undeveloped land of huge resources but grinding poverty. In effect, the Island became little more than a gigantic fish-processing platform surrounded by the richest fishing waters known to man from about May to November, and a deserted outpost the rest of the year.

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1. Growth of the Cod Fishery

In his classic work *A History of Newfoundland*, originally published in 1895, Judge D W Prowse quotes from a paper written by Rev George Patterson:

Immediately after Gaspar Cortereal’s first voyage—1500 or 1501—fishing companies were formed in Viana, Aveiro, and Terceira, Portugal, for the purpose of founding establishments in Terra Nova ... At different times Aveira alone had 60 vessels sailing to Newfoundland, and in 1550 150 fishing vessels. Equal numbers sailing from Oporto and other ports, gave a large increase of revenue.  

Prowse provides some other statistics relating to the size of the fishing effort in Newfoundland in the sixteenth century. During the reign of Philip II of Spain (1556 - 1581) 200 Spanish ships with 6000 men were employed in the fishery, but by 1593, after the destruction of the Armada (1588) only 8 Spanish ships were present in a fleet of 80 or more English and French ships. In 1541-2, 60 French ships were involved, and during January and February of 1544 about two ships left every day for Newfoundland. In 1561 thirty vessels of 150 tons each set sail. These were large ships for their time, and they represented a prodigious effort, especially when the distance and time are considered. As the century progressed, the Spanish and French fleets declined in number, but the English fleet grew, although the fishery remained a seasonal venture with no permanent shore settlement except for a few caretaker settlers who wintered in Newfoundland. By the next century, while France, Spain and Portugal still fished the waters of Newfoundland, England had become the dominant nation, with much of her effort shifted from the older Iceland fishery to the New World. All these nations continued fishing the waters of both Iceland and Newfoundland right down to modern times.

From this time onward, voyages to the northwest Atlantic became increasingly frequent, and slowly, as more information was gathered, on the maps of the time the outline of Newfoundland began to assume

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26 Prowse, quoting a variety of sources, Appendix to Chapter 3, pp48-50.
the shape we know today. As well as the profitable fishery, great interest was generated in Europe over the fabled wealth in precious metals and spices of the New World, and during the next centuries many joined in the frustrating and perilous effort to find a sea route beyond the Americas to the Far East. Hundreds of ships and thousands of English men were engaged in these various enterprises on Newfoundland’s East Coast, but little if any of the effort ventured as far as the West Coast and the Bay of Islands.

From about 1550 and for more than a hundred years a thriving whaling industry was established by the Basques at Red Bay on the southern coast of Labrador. A number of sunken ships have been excavated in the waters of Red Bay and nearby, and on Saddle Island in that bay the graves of about 150 Basque fishermen have been identified along with extensive installations where the carcases of whales were processed. But even though whales were plentiful then, as today, in the Gulf of St Lawrence, and the Bay of Islands would have served as an excellent base of operations, no such industry was attempted there until the late 19th century when, among other such enterprises, a few whale processing factories were established in the region, including one at Lark Harbour in 1911. As far is is known, this factory processed only one whale carcase before it was abandoned, but some relics are still visible on the beach at the western end of the Harbour between the modern Coastguard Station and the entrance of the Blow-Me-Down Provincial Park.

2. Maps of Newfoundland

By the middle of the seventeenth century the social pattern that would last until at least the dawn of the twentieth had begun to be established. While the East Coast of the Island had become familiar to many European mariners, and its bays and headlands had received names which were recorded on the maps, the West Coast, despite its plentiful resources of fish, was not being exploited. A glance at almost any of the maps dating from the early 1500s onwards will reveal an increasing knowledge of the coastal outlines and rivers with numerous entries of names of natural features on the eastern half of the Island, but remarkably few on the western half. This may have been due in part to the greater French influence in the Gulf, coupled with the English willingness to concentrate on the Atlantic side where they were less affected by their traditional rivals.

Cartography in the sixteenth century was still in its infancy, held back by the difficulty of making detailed observations and measurements due to the lack of accurate navigational equipment. At this time

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27 British archeologist Selma Barkham’s work among the archives of France and Spain enabled her to identify the Red Bay site as a Basque whaling station dating from around 1600.
there were no precise chronometers, which would not begin to appear until the eighteenth century, so the
detailed determination of latitude and longitude essential for the making of maps was not possible. The
information needed by cartographers was of necessity obtained from the mariners who had made the voyages
but who generally lacked the skills needed to determine, log or describe accurately where they had been. As
might be expected, therefore, various discrepancies appeared on maps, and consensus was impossible. Most
of these early maps show the entire eastern seaboard of North America, from Labrador to Florida, as one
unbroken coastline, with the Strait of Belle Isle and the Cabot Strait both drawn as large bays. For example
the 1525 maps of Salviati and Castiglioni, and that of 1529 by Girolama da Verrazzano, brother of Giovanni
of greater fame, are so drawn, as is another by a Spanish government official, about 1545, and even one,
dated 1544, claiming to have been drawn by Sebastian Caboto, the explorer’s son. Several of these maps
clearly identify Newfoundland as Tierra de Bacallaos, “land of the codfish”, a name still remembered in the
Island of Baccalieu on Newfoundland’s East Coast, so that was clearly the intention of the early
cartographers. Later, the world map of 1550 by Pierre Desceliers and Mercator’s map of 1569 (both
illustrated on the previous page) show Newfoundland as an island. Both maps depict coastlines that are quite
recognisable to a modern viewer, although the Avalon Peninsula appears as a separate island on both, and
Desceliers represents White Bay and Bay St George as separate bays, while Mercator links them as a narrow
channel creating a third island. Some others show a number of inaccuracies, including depicting Labrador as an island and sometimes showing very imaginative routes, perhaps wishful thinking, of a Northwest Passage. Mercator’s map of 1569 incorporates great improvements in accuracy for the most part, although he represents Newfoundland as two large islands, Terra de bacallaos, and Ilhe de S. Julien. 28

3. Colonisation: Trial and Error

The second half of the sixteenth century saw increased development of English naval power, focusing on the need to defend the homeland against Spain. On 1583 August 03 Sir Humphrey Gilbert, armed with a commission from Queen Elizabeth I (1558 - 1603) of England, entered St John’s Harbour with a fleet of five ships ranging in size from two hundred tons down to merely ten. He found thirty-six ships of various nations, including some from England, in the port. At first they were reluctant to receive him, but the royal commission solved that problem, and two days later he took formal possession of the New Found Land in the name of Queen Elizabeth. 29 Thus was formally created England’s first colony, but for all practical purposes there was no colony as we imagine it today, because officially no permanent settlement was permitted. However Gilbert’s commission from the Queen succeeded in laying the foundation of the empire which would continue to grow, howbeit slowly, for the next three hundred years.

The feared invasion of England by Spain was attempted in 1588 with the famous Armada of ships and men in numbers far superior to those the English could muster. 30 The Armada sailed up the English Channel and put into Calais on the French coast to embark an invasion force of soldiers to be ferried to the English coast. But Queen Elizabeth’s Navy, led by Lord Howard and the renowned Sir Francis Drake, rose to the occasion and, aided by a generous measure of good luck in the form of an onshore wind, the English were able to send fire ships into Calais. Simultaneously the onshore wind made it very difficult for the Spanish vessels to leave. The harbour was so crowded with the huge Spanish vessels that it was difficult to move, and many of them found themselves trapped and burned. Of those that did manage to escape by attempting the difficult headwind exit from their harbours, many more were destroyed by the guns of the waiting English ships, and those that did successfully clear the harbour were chased by the English as they sailed eastwards into the North Sea and then northwards to pass by Scotland into the open Atlantic Ocean west of Scotland and Ireland. Here they encountered more inclement weather and many of the already damaged Spanish ships were lost. The remnants of the huge fleet, the pride of Spain, limped home in

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28 Cumming et al, pp93-125.
29 O’Neill, Paul: The Oldest City, the Story of St John’s Newfoundland. Press Porcepic, Erin, ON, Canada, 1975, p39.
30 130 ships with 2,500 guns, 8,000 seamen, and almost 20,000 soldiers
disarray. This defeat of the Spanish Armada, the greatest fleet ever assembled at that time, resulted in a huge psychological advantage for England over Spain, Portugal and France when, coupled with the tremendous popularity of Queen Elizabeth I among the common people at home, it gave a powerful impetus to the succeeding development of nationhood and the acquisition of colonies.  

However Newfoundland, which by providing a rigorous training ground for the Elizabethan navy had indirectly played a major role in the naval victory, received little recognition. Through no fault of her own, Newfoundland was slow in acquiring a permanent population. Although the mercantile rewards offered by the waters of Newfoundland should and could have encouraged colonial development, there were distinct drawbacks to being Britain’s Oldest Colony. Those who came for the fishery were obligated to return to England in the fall. Newfoundland was in fact being used not as a home for the expanding population of the growing European nations, or even as a foothold for the future empire, but as little more than a huge base for the highly profitable fishing operations which benefited the wealthy ship owners and merchants, and as is too often the case, little of this wealth percolated down to the common people. This sad state of affairs continued for centuries.

The old Colonial system was mercantile rather than imperial. There is no more striking example of this than the treatment of Newfoundland. The purpose of English interest in Newfoundland in 1760, as it continued to be throughout George’s reign, was not to paint the map red to colonise, it was to find a base for fishermen hailing from the little West Country ports from Poole to Falmouth. It was therefore forbidden for anyone to settle permanently in Newfoundland. It was not to be a settlement but a great centre for the drying of nets and the packing of fish, a safe harbour for those in temporary danger. It was regarded as part of the naval service and its governor was a naval commander who divided his time between a quarter-deck and St John’s, thinking of them in the same way. Strenuous attempts were made to prevent the 10,000 or 15,000 residents from being increased.  

Meanwhile, the influence of Spain after the defeat of the Armada was seriously eclipsed, but the power of France was now growing rapidly. Spain no longer presented a serious threat to England and made no attempts to establish herself in the northwest, instead concentrating her influence further south around the Gulf of Mexico. But the power of France developed apace, until a century later, about 1700, it is estimated that the French fishery employed between sixteen and twenty thousand men, with a navy that had been nurtured on the success of the fishery and was equally strong. The great fortress at Louisbourg, Cape Breton

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31 It has been the popular belief that after the destruction of the Armada the power of Spain went into irreversible decline. However many historians challenge this view. For example, see Philip II of Spain by Sir Charles Petrie, RU/Eyre & Spottiswoode, London 1964, pp 289-290.

Island, had become a major bastion of the French military establishment. Thus French power was becoming a threat to the success of any English endeavours, but little or nothing was done to remedy it. Instead, what few measures were taken, aside from the establishment of some marginal colonies, tended to work in the other direction.

In 1565 there had been no permanent settlers anywhere on the Island. In 1610 under a Royal Charter creating the Newfoundland Company for the merchants of Bristol and London, John Guy made the first attempt to establish a real colony, “Sea Forest Plantation”. But in spite of its official inception and a good start, the colony soon fell on hard times, suffering hostilities at the hands of the wealthy west country fishermen who resented its existence. Located at the modern town of Cupids (then called Cuper’s Cove) at the head of Conception Bay on the Avalon Peninsula, the settlement initially consisted of 39 men but no women. Two years later 16 women arrived from England, presumably to add permanence to the Colony, and in 1613 a child was born there, believed to be the first English child to be born in Newfoundland. The Colony enjoyed some success during its first couple of years, managing to grow some produce, but during the hard winter of 1613 it encountered difficulties and finally collapsed in 1615 when most of the surviving settlers returned to England. Other attempts at colonisation, including some by the French, were made over the next few years, with comparable results of failure and lack of success.

Five other colonies were also attempted by the English during the next few years, under the leadership of men like Sir William Vaughan, Lord Baltimore, Lord Falkland, Bacon, Kirke, and others. All were located on the eastern half of Newfoundland, mostly the Avalon region. Numerous quarrels ensued between the colonists and the fishermen, until the Star Chamber Rules of 1633 and 1670 set up laws for the governance of the Island, giving very clear advantages to the incoming fishermen as opposed to the resident colonists. Among other enactments, the First Order of Star Chamber stated “That no planter [permanent resident] cut down any wood, or plant within six miles of the sea shore”, “That no inhabitant or planter take up best stages before arrival of fishermen”, and “That no master or owner of ships transport seamen or fishermen to Nfld unless belonging to his ship’s company”. These rules clearly favoured the ship fishery at the expense of the settlers. Thus began the infamous rule of the “fishing admirals”, a system by which the captain of the first vessel to arrive in a harbour in spring was officially granted paramilitary rights for the entire fishing season over those arriving later. This alone was sufficient to prevent permanent settlement

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33 This provision forbade those who had over-wintered in Newfoundland from making use of any existing fishing stages until the migrant fishermen had arrived and selected the best locations for their own needs, thus effectively hampering the permanent residents who may have been ready to start fishing before the arrival of the migrants.

34 Prowse, Appendix to Chapter VI, p155.
until the next century. Thus, when these adversities were combined with the harsh Newfoundland winters and the great distance from the home base in England, it is hardly surprising that few braved the challenges of both man and nature.

The Second Order of Star Chamber was passed in 1670 after the urging of Sir Josiah Child, a powerful English west country merchant with interests in the East India Company and other trading concerns. This document virtually gave the west country fishing merchants the right to do as they wished with the settlers: they destroyed property, they threatened (and surely used) violence, they imprisoned the settlers for no reason. This continued until 1677 when a fresh directive arrived which allowed the settlers to continue possession of their houses and stages “until further orders”. Some respite was thus provided, but it did not amount to much that would benefit the settlers.

4. The Treaties: Utrecht (1713) and Paris (1763)

Because the fishery was so valuable, there were disputes between the English and the French over who might fish where, what rights different parties held to construct fishing rooms, and who controlled a particular harbour, as well as minor skirmishes and occasional outright attacks. Legislation, too, or the lack of it, as well as the “fishing admirals”, made settlement difficult if not impossible, and the wars against France in the early 1700s compounded the difficulties. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) which terminated hostilities with France, gave Britain sovereignty of Newfoundland island but allowed the French to retain fishing rights between Bonavista on the East Coast and Point Riche on the west side of the Great Northern Peninsula. (See maps p67)

The terms of this section of the Treaty of Utrecht affected about a third of the Island’s entire coastline, including much of the best-known fishing grounds of that time. It also had the potential to solve some problems by awarding the British the right to establish law and order if they so chose, which they did not. Instead, they did nothing, and the French were able to take advantage of their side of the Treaty, using its terms to make life more difficult for the English while the Royal Navy did nothing to help their own countrymen. Editorialising on the difficulties caused for the colonists by the implementation of the Treaty, Prowse states:

This unfortunate state of affairs was due to the extraordinary imbecility of the British Government. They endeavoured to rule the Colony without a Governor, to defend it from invasion without adequate military or naval force, to distribute justice without duly constituted courts or laws made by the authority of the Imperial Parliament; in fine, they went on administering the affairs of the Island in the most blundering manner, and then

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35 Prowse, p196.
stupidly wondered because the inevitable result was chronic disorder and chaotic confusion. 36

Nowhere in the history of Newfoundland is there to be found a clearer illustration of the way the Colony’s interests were subjugated, abused, and even sacrificed, to benefit those of the mother country, than that afforded by the three Treaties. Instead of using this opportunity to secure Newfoundland as a British possession by encouraging settlement, the authorities allowed control to remain with the mercantile leadership who continued in the narrow belief that a permanent population was harmful to the mobile fishery. This resulted in the ban on residence remaining in force. Newfoundland in general suffered badly from this short-sighted policy, and after the change which shifted French fishing and curing rights from the eastern side of the Island where some English civil jurisdiction existed, to the western half where there was none, the West Coast was even more severely hampered. What fishermen or settlers were going to venture into unfamiliar territory when there was no organised system of support and a constant risk from the unsympathetic French? The present-day imbalance of population which still favours the East Coast of the Island, and the lack of social and industrial development on the West Coast until 1904 when the Treaties were terminated, may well both be blamed in large part on this policy. Even the advent of Responsible Government in 1832 brought no remedies for the West Coast, as will be seen in later chapters. 37

The rest of North America was receiving immigrants from Europe at an astounding rate, while few, if any, were coming to Newfoundland. The areas more remote from St John’s, like the West Coast, officially received no permanent settlers at all, although there was almost certainly a constant trickle of individuals who, for reasons best known to themselves, left their homelands and jumped ship to settle in a place where no questions were asked.

A map of 1720 by the French cartographer T Cour Lotter 38 was typical of its time in showing the Island of Newfoundland and the shores of the Gulf of St Lawrence as exhibiting a marked lack of settlement from Ingornachioix Bay (Point Riche, 50°42N 57°21W, about half way up the Great Northern Peninsula) to Cape Ray on the southwestern corner of the Island. Within that 400 kilometre stretch of coast are marked La Belle Baye (Bonne Bay), Les Trois Isles (Tweed, Guernsey and Pearl Islands in the mouth of the Bay of Islands) and La Baye des Trois Isles itself (Bay of Islands, also known as Bay de St Julian on some early 18th

36 Prowse, p275
37 Only limited social and industrial development occurred on the West Coast until after 1860. A few small industries like the Christopher Fisher sawmill had appeared in the late 1800s, but the Corner Brook Paper Mill was not founded until 1925, after the 1923 sale of the sawmill site; in contrast, the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company (formed in 1905) had opened its mill in Grand Falls in 1909.
38 Prowse, p279
century maps

), Port a Port (shown incorrectly at the location of Serpentine River), Isle S Georges, Baye St Georges, Cap a l’Anguille, Baye a l’Anguille, and Point a l’Aneau, a total of nine named features. A stretch of comparable length on the east coast of the Island has approximately sixty names. All other coasts around the Gulf are equally well supplied with names, with the exception of Anticosti Island which was another similarly uncolonised location. On this basis alone it would probably be safe to suggest that there were virtually no permanent inhabitants on the West Coast at this time, except for a handful of unofficial settlers. Yet, less than fifty years later, in 1765, Governor Hugh Palliser reported 15,484 inhabitants, men, women and children inclusive, and 9,152 fishermen (probably mostly seasonal) in addition for a total of 24,636 on the entire Island; in 1766 Sir Joseph Banks reported in his journal that St John’s had a population of 1,100, contributing to a total of some 10,000 on the entire Island. Most of these 10,000 were located on the Avalon Peninsula and the East Coast. There is an obvious discrepancy between Palliser’s and Banks’s figures, but if the figure of 10,000 is even approximately correct, under ordinary circumstances one might have expected that some of these would have established themselves on the West Coast, given the generous resources of ocean and land reported there by all who saw it.

Although the 1713 Treaty should have settled matters between the English and the French, such was not the case. One mistake made was the placing of the administrative control of Placentia into the hands of the Nova Scotia government. Queen Anne (reigned 1702-1714) then instructed the Governor of Nova Scotia to allow French subjects to retain their property in Placentia as a gesture of thanks to the French king Louis XIV for his releasing of some French protestants who had been used as galley slaves. Humane as this was, it was another typical example of the way Britain used Newfoundland for her own often whimsical political and economic convenience. It resulted in a virtual “fifth column” being established in an area that by rights now had exclusive British control. This incident however was only one of a number where Newfoundland

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40 Whiteley, in his pamphlet James Cook in Newfoundland, refers to a paper by Professor E.R.Seary, Toponymy of the Island of Newfoundland. Check-list no.2. Names. 1. The Northern Peninsula, St John’s, Memorial University, 1960. In this paper Scary makes a similar comment, attributing to James Cook more numerous contributions to place names than any of his predecessors had made. He points out that a 1764 manuscript chart of the coast from Griquet to Ferolle contained 115 names compared with 30 on previous maps.
41 Anticosti also suffered from restrictions which delayed its settlement. It had been annexed to Newfoundland from 1763 to 1774 and again from 1809 to 1825, when it became part of Lower Canada. At that time the waters surrounding it had been open to all. But in 1895 a wealthy French chocolate maker, Henri Menier, had bought the island for $125,000 and leased the shore fishing rights for himself. He also built the small town of Port-Menier and a cannery for fish and lobster, and turned the island into a game reserve where he raised animals for his own personal hunting. The island in effect became his own personal fiefdom.
42 Prowse, p325.
43 O’Neill, (1) p349.
was used as a pawn to advance the myopic interests of the Old Country. Moreover, further irritation resulted from the perennial disputes over the actual extent of the French fishing rights, as also did the locations of the two points, Bonavista and Point Riche, which marked the agreed extremities of French activity under the 1713 Treaty.

Various military engagements, including the defeat and recapture of Louisbourg, took place between Britain and France during the fifty years leading up to 1763, when the Treaty of Paris was signed to supersede the Treaty of Utrecht. After some haggling this treaty, from Newfoundland’s viewpoint basically a revision of the earlier one, awarded the archipelago of St Pierre and Miquelon to France, and confirmed French rights to fish between Bonavista and Point Riche. (See maps p67) At this point, 1764, Sir Hugh Palliser became Governor of Newfoundland.

Although Palliser was yet one more in the long line of marine commanders to be placed in charge of Newfoundland, and while with hindsight we may not entirely approve of his policies, he should be credited for his great efforts to strengthen the British position in the Island. Not only did Palliser recognise the importance of providing for the defence of the Island as a means of competing against the French even during times of peace, but he made it his business to travel throughout his territory to see firsthand what this great land was like. To assist in this he recruited a man who would soon become known as one of the world’s greatest mariners.

5. James Cook in Newfoundland (1764-1767)

In April 1764 a successful master mariner named James Cook was appointed master of the Grenville (previously the Sally, a 68 ton schooner built in Massachusetts and purchased by Governor Graves). Born in Whitby, northern England, he had learned the shipmaster’s trade as skipper of a small vessel used to carry coal from the north to London. That year, 1764, Governor Graves was replaced by Hugh Palliser, who was already well acquainted with Cook’s capabilities as surveyor and cartographer, and the new Governor was not long in making use of his talents. It should be noted that Palliser was genuinely concerned to ensure that the French should not exceed their treaty rights in regard to the fishery, and he fully intended to take charge in this matter. 44 The Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 had now been superseded by that of Paris of 1763. The new Governor interpreted the Treaty as giving exclusive authority to the English to be the sole arbiters in any disputes which might arise, and he was determined to enforce it. Adequate naval patrols therefore had to be

44 Whiteley, William H: James Cook in Newfoundland, 1762-1767. “...Palliser had uncovered evidence which indicated that the French were attempting to use St Pierre and Miquelon as a military and naval base... There was every reason for Palliser to want the bays and harbours adjacent to the French islands [of St Pierre and Miquelon] thoroughly charted, both to assist British warships in their patrols, and to encourage English fishermen to venture along the heavily indented coastline.” p8.
instigated, and good navigational aids were essential for safety and effective supervision. Before Cook left England for Newfoundland that spring, Palliser had instructed him to search London for relevant charts that might help in resolving a major dispute. The following account by Dr William H Whiteley gives an illustration of the great practical importance of Cook’s work, as well as some insight into the abysmal state of cartography on the West Coast of Newfoundland at that time:

The question they [Cook and Palliser] had to grapple with immediately was a claim by the French government that the western terminus of the French shore, Point Riche, was one and the same as Cape Ray. Acceptance of this claim would, of course, have extended the inshore fishing rights of the French down the whole western coast of Newfoundland. That the claim could seriously be advanced is testimony to the confused and hazy state of knowledge in regard to the geography of Newfoundland at this time. The French Ambassador rested his claim on several maps of Newfoundland, chiefly on those of Herman Moll, published in 1715 and 1720. Palliser employed Cook in searching the shops of the London book and map sellers for evidence to the contrary. On March 7 Cook reported some of his findings to Palliser, concluding: “I have seen no maps today but such as we see yesterday, except the above, neither have I met with any histories or voyages that make any mention of what we want”. Palliser subsequently turned Cook’s memorandum in to the Admiralty, along with other lists of maps and information he had accumulated demonstrating that Point Riche and Cape Ray were separate and distinct. The French subsequently dropped their claim.  

In 1767 Cook surveyed the Bay of Islands where he remarked on the convenient fishing harbours at the entrance to the Bay. Presumably these were Little Port and Bottle Cove on the outside of the Bay of Islands and south of the entrance, and Lark Harbour, the first opening encountered on entering the Bay. Cook then proceeded further into the Bay, into the Humber Arm, entering the Humber River and continuing four miles into Deer Lake, where he “could see no land at the N.E. and the weather being then very clear”. He also observed that “the banks of this river and the shores of the Lake are well clothed with timber such as are common in this country. In this river has formerly been a great salmon fishery and the Bay of Islands has been much frequented by fishers.” Whiteley suggests that Cook supplemented his own observations with information gathered from natives of the country, 46 so by this time there must have been some small number of permanent residents, either European or aboriginal, living in the inner reaches of the Bay of Islands if not in the Outer Bay, although Cook apparently did not encounter any of them at this particular time.

With the completion of Cook’s marine surveys in 1767 there were now available to mariners for the first time reliable navigational aids covering the West Coast of Newfoundland and the Gulf of St Lawrence. Among the vessels assigned to the Newfoundland squadron around this time were HMS Lark and HMS York,

45 Whiteley, William H: James Cook, Hugh Palliser, and the Newfoundland Fishery. p6
46 Whiteley, William H: James Cook in Newfoundland, 1762-1767.
Herman Moll’s map of 1720 showing Point Riche where Cape Ray should be, at the SW tip of Newfoundland. At the true location of Point Riche, some 300 km further up the West Coast, to the north, Moll indicates two features, Point de Miari and Point de Chouard. Moll’s location of Point de Chouard is actually Point Riche. Cook stated to Palliser that he had seen no maps of Newfoundland other than some produced by French cartographers which supported Moll’s designation. Prow se (p281) also includes a small print of this same map by Moll.
after which the two harbours, and later the communities, were named. Cook, or others in company with him, may have named some of the natural features around the Bay, including several of the mountains and islands, but the existence of charts made in 1764 show that many of these had already been named before Cook’s visit in 1767. Examples are Blow-me-down Mountain, Tweed Island, Guernsey Island and Pearl Island, the latter three features named after vessels of the Newfoundland squadron. It was a common practice to name features after the ships present at the time of discovery or charting, as well as after members of the ship’s company or sponsors of the voyage. Nor is mention made of any residents in the immediate area of the Outer Bay of Islands (cf paragraph second above) so we must assume there were few. However, Cook mentioned “a great salmon fishery” and also that the Bay “has been much frequented by fishers”. Within twenty years of Cook’s visit there was a productive salmon fishery on the Humber River some thirty kilometres inland to the east, for an English fisherman was reported to have brought 76 tierces of salmon and £265 worth of furs, a valuable quantity of merchandise, from there to St John’s in 1787. This enterprise may even have existed at the time of Cook’s visit. But things must still have been somewhat precarious as the establishment seems to have been abandoned the following year. At last, however, with the Bay of Islands explored and competently charted for mariners, one more obstacle to settlement was conquered. The charts produced by Cook and his crew members were so reliable that they remained in regular use by mariners for a century.

Under Palliser’s administration the fishery, and all associated with it, prospered. The Governor was very energetic in the pursuance of his responsibilities, and visited many parts of the territory in his charge, including the Bay of Islands. Unfortunately, in spite of his keen support of British rights in Newfoundland, he saw no need to reverse the policy that discouraged permanent settlement on the Island, though he did not actively enforce that policy either.

47 Although HMS Lark and HMS York must have patrolled the Bay of Islands during the years they were assigned to the Newfoundland Squadron, James Cook was never appointed captain of either of them, or any other naval vessel. He was never placed in any position of authority over them, nor could he be, since he held no naval commission during his years in Newfoundland waters. His official title at that time was not “captain”, but “master”. In the Royal Navy, the master was in charge of sailing the ship, and was subordinate to the captain who was in charge of all the ship’s operations, including military. The schooner Grenville, ex Sally, built in Massachusetts and purchased by the Royal Navy in 1764 for Cook’s use during his surveying, was not a fighting ship. Having no commission Cook was not qualified to command a fighting ship of the Royal Navy and did not hold the rank of captain, but he could, and did, command a non-fighting vessel as master. Also, despite popular local assertions to the contrary, he did not name our harbours after “his” ships, as there is no evidence that he was in this area before his charting voyage of 1767. It is more likely that those names were already assigned by others. In a letter to The Western Star (1995 August 15) Olaf Janzen, a Grenfell College historian, points out that most of these names had already appeared on earlier maps drawn by Joseph Gilbert who was sailing master of HMS Guernsey, the ship in which Palliser visited the Bay of Islands in 1764. Guernsey Island (known locally as “Wee Ball” from the French name “Ouibol”) was named after Joseph Gilbert’s ship.

48 A tierce is 35 Imperial gallons. 265 English poundsworth of furs would have a value today of many thousands of dollars.

6. The Treaty of Versailles (1783)

In 1776 came the American Declaration of Independence. This was the signal for American privateers, who had barely been kept at bay before the declaration, to feel totally free to ply their trade against British interests. Then in 1778 France recognised the independence of the United States and declared war against Britain, providing herself with a new ally against an old enemy. It seems unlikely, too, that the French navy
would discourage any action against the British by privateers. Thus Newfoundland was caught in the middle, and for the first time, but by no means the last, she became a major theatre of battle in Britain’s defence strategy. Five years later, in 1783, the Treaty of Versailles, the third and last in the series, was signed, affirming St Pierre and Miquelon to the French, and changing once more the area of French inshore fishing rights to the shoreline from Cape John to Cape Ray. (See Maps p67). This change from the previous treaties placed the Bay of Islands squarely within the limits of the French Shore, a situation which continued in effect until 1904. So, for more than another century the Treaty of Versailles remained a serious hindrance to any formal social development in the region. The West Coast was no longer exclusively a British domain, since the new Treaty of Versailles gave the French valuable rights which extended over its entire length and were jealously guarded by their navy and fishermen alike; and Britain, like France, now had no rights of settlement there.

Understandably, the Treaty of Versailles was not popular in Newfoundland nor, ironically, did it work to the real advantage of the French. A few English settlers were already since at least 1767 unofficially established on the West Coast. Despite being in contravention of the Treaty, these hard individuals were not inclined to relinquish their holdings which they found quite profitable despite the French presence. Coupled with that, a declining fishery placed the French at a further disadvantage and, since the terms of the Treaty prohibited their overwintering on the Island, when the French ships arrived in spring the English settlers, who in theory if not in practice had overwintered on the East Coast, had already taken a good catch. A similar scenario repeated itself each fall after the French had sailed for Europe at the end of the season.

The French Revolution of 1789, and later the Napoleonic period with its wars culminating in the defeat of the French navy at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1815, gave Britain virtually unquestioned supremacy on the high seas for the next hundred years. During all of this time Newfoundland enjoyed a modest degree of prosperity by providing supplies to the military establishment, although little of it resulted from any conscious practical effort by the Mother Country to bring it about. The few settlers of the West Coast, going about their daily business in the sheltered bays and fiords they had chosen as their home, very slowly increased in number and gradually became the undisputed controllers of their half of the Island, despite occasional visits from American privateers, from the French, and even from the English navy which might have been expected to tacitly take their side. Instead, though, the Royal Navy had the clearly assigned duty to enforce the terms of the Treaty regardless of who might have infringed it, and against whom. As a result, for most of the next century there was sometimes active suppression of the rights of the English settlers by what should have been ‘their own’ Navy. (This will be treated in more detail in a later chapter.)
However the price of fish remained quite good, and other lines of productivity and profit were
developed. Herring and lobsters, mostly used as bait at this time, became useful staples. Subsistence
farming developed, and small forest industries started to appear in the inner reaches of the bays. Commerce
with mainland Canada, conveniently located just across the Gulf, began to assume importance on the West
Coast, replacing some of the traditional trade with England which was so much further away. This particular
factor, though it did not yet dominate the economics or politics of the region, became a significant underlying
feature, and played an increasing role over the next century. The achievement of Confederation with Canada
in 1949 may in fact owe more to the West Coast’s alienation from the eastern half of the Island, and its own
connections with Maritime Canada than is obvious at first glance.

In 1832, however, Confederation with Canada was not an option. After the pattern being applied to
the mainland Colonies by England, Newfoundland was that year granted the right to representative
government, but as subsequent history will demonstrate, this was far from an absolute right, and the decisions
of the elected government of the Colony of Newfoundland were frequently changed, over-ruled, or completely
ignored by the colonial authority in London. But it was one more step forward, no matter how small, and the
aspirations of the people of Newfoundland were receiving at least a token recognition. Britain’s Oldest (yet
only recently acknowledged) Colony was slowly but painfully coming of age. Even the long-neglected West
Coast, not enfranchised with the rest of the Island until 1882 because of obligations under the Treaties with
the French, was finally coming into its own. But the birth pangs would last much longer.

* * * * *
THE FORGOTTEN BAY

Chapter IV

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

1833 - 1904

1. Development on the West Coast

Beginning on the east coast, Basque, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English fishermen had established extensive fisheries around all the shores of Newfoundland, gradually extending their efforts until they had encompassed the entire Island by about 1700. Exact dates are not available for such usage of the Bay of Islands, but there is evidence to suggest that nationals of all those countries and regions were present in significant numbers on the West Coast and were successfully exploiting its plentiful resources around the same time.

By the late 18th century the Bay of Islands had become a well-frequented fishing area for the Europeans, some of whom left behind their artefacts when they went home, and some of whom died and are buried around the Bay. Place names such as Bottle Cove, an anglicisation of the French name L’Anse aux bateaux, ‘the bay of boats’, now part of the modern municipality of Lark Harbour, are found everywhere. Burial sites have been identified locally as those of French or Basque sailors who died through disease or accident and were buried on some lonely shoreline. Sometimes they are completely forgotten; other times they are remembered locally and may be fenced and even tended by a local person out of respect for the dead: unknown warriors whose graves represent the thousands who died in a foreign land far from home. One of these exists on the Lark Harbour side of the Blow-Me-Down Provincial Park, and another at Bottle Cove; there may be many others as yet unidentified.

There also exist records and folk accounts of events, sometimes humorous, sometimes tragic or disastrous, like this account of

a heated altercation [in which] the mate of a French ship killed the captain. A sort of drum-head court martial held on deck condemned the wretch to die. But he was given his choice either to be swung from the yard-arm, or climb to the top of South Head and leap over the
precipice. He chose the latter. With his arms pinioned he was conducted to the brow of the fearful precipice, and when the word was given, boldly sprang into the air. His body never was found, having probably lodged in a cleft in the side of the cliff.  

Newfoundland had been granted the right of Responsible Government in 1832, theoretically giving her equal ranking with the other North American colonies, but enfranchisement was not yet granted to the West Coast. In fact it was not until 1882, half a century later, that the first election took place in the Bay of Islands, and Michael H Carty, a lawyer from St John’s, was elected. This practice of electing candidates who today would be described as “parachuted in” would not usually garner much success in the polls, but it was not uncommon a century or more ago. While Mr Carty may have been a fine man, as a lawyer from the capital it is unlikely that he knew or was known by many local people outside his own social group. He was therefore probably elected by the votes of people from his own social stratum with very little support from the less privileged who lived in the dozens of isolated coves and may not even have known that an election was taking place.

There remained other very significant factors as obstacles to free development, and the Imperial Government in London had so far shown no inclination to resolve them in any way beneficial to the Colony: the French Shore treaties, with their prohibition on permanent settlement in the controlled areas, continued to limit the autonomy of the Island, discouraging the development of free trade and settlement on the West Coast. Although this restriction was not lifted until 1904, nevertheless a steady migration of fishermen and their families had begun from Bay St George to the south and Labrador to the north, and also of single young men from various places of Europe who, press-ganged or enticed, forfeited family ties in the old country in preference to returning home to Europe at the end of the season via the appalling living conditions which prevailed on their ships. Significant numbers of young French-speaking people, established settlers on Cape Breton Island also came and set up their enterprises in the Bay St George region where they raised their families. Eventually this group, with French names, intermarried with English or Scottish families and ‘Leblanc’ became ‘White’, ‘Benoit’ became ‘Bennett’, etc, creating Newfoundland’s version of Canada’s familiar cultural “mosaic”.

2. Visit of Archdeacon Edward Wix

To this point the churches, mainly Church of England (Anglican) and Roman Catholic, had not shown much presence in Newfoundland except on the East Coast where they were concentrated mostly around the Avalon,


51 There are several instances of this. See page 31 for an actual example; also in the Appendix, Granny and the French Deserter, for another, rather amusing, example.
specifically St John’s. However they were not silent and in some instances they worked diligently, making their viewpoints known to those in authority. One of the earliest documentary accounts telling about the inhabitants of the Bay of Islands is found in the *Journal* of Archdeacon Edward Wix, in which he describes his experiences as he travelled around the Island for a period of six months in 1835. Born in England, he was appointed to the Anglican Church’s Archdeaconry of Newfoundland in 1829. 52 This was the most senior Anglican appointment in Newfoundland at the time, as the Colony had no resident bishop until 1839. Shortly after receiving this appointment the Archdeacon made several journeys around his extensive area of responsibility. The contrast between the genteel lifestyle of a nineteenth century clergyman used to the sophisticated world of middle class England and (to a lesser extent) St John’s, and the rough-and-ready existence of those who through either choice or necessity inhabited the bays of Western Newfoundland, is nothing short of riveting. While in the Bay of Islands the Archdeacon was informed by a senior inhabitant whose name is not given, that the area had been visited six years earlier, in 1829, by Rev William Bullock in company with the Governor of the Colony, Sir Thomas Cochrane. Having just arrived in the Bay of Islands where he held “two full services, and baptized fourteen children”, the Archdeacon made the following disturbing entry in his Journal:

Sunday 24 May 1835 ... There were acts of profligacy practised, indeed, in this bay, at which the Micmac Indians expressed to me their horror and disgust. The arrival of a trading schooner among the people, affords an invariable occasion for all parties (with only one or two exceptions, and those, I regret to say, *not* among the females!) to get into a helpless state of intoxication. Women, and among them positively girls of fourteen, may be seen, under the plea of its helping them in their work, habitually taking their ‘morning’ of raw spirits before breakfast. I have seen this dram repeated a second time before a seven o’clock breakfast ... One woman was pointed out to me here, who, in her haste to attack a quantity of rum, which she had brought on shore with her from a trading vessel, and under the influence, at the same time, of a certain quantity which she had drunk on board, left an infant of six months old upon the landwash and forgot this her sucking child, till the body of it was discovered the next morning, drowned by the returning tide! The father, immediately after the discovery of the awful disaster, went on board, unwarned, and apparently unaffected, for another gallon of the poison for the wake, or wicked drinking revel, which the custom of the island has commonly made an appendage to a funeral.

Wix must have been aware that what he was hearing and observing about the poor settlers of Newfoundland was actually little different from what he might have witnessed in almost any slum of a nineteenth century English or European city, in the pioneer settlements of Canada or the USA, or in parts of some more

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52 At this time Newfoundland was part of the Diocese of Nova Scotia. As Archdeacon of Newfoundland, Rev Edward Wix was the senior official of the Church of England in Newfoundland until the appointment of Rev Aubrey George Spencer as the first Bishop of Newfoundland in 1839.
sophisticated cities like Halifax, Toronto, or St John’s, Newfoundland.

As a remedy, Archdeacon Wix called for missionaries and schools to be provided, the same solutions that were being applied simultaneously throughout the rest of North America and the western world. He quotes an example of the contrast between those unfortunates described above, and others who, but for the opportunity to avail of a good Christian education, might have been little different. He speaks in the following terms of his “worthy friend, M.J.” [Michael James], a man employed in the Bay of Islands by a Jersey fish merchant, and who had provided him with transportation around the area:

Friday 29 May 1835. The superior demeanour of this person, compared with that of the people by whom he is surrounded, and his superior religious intelligence, were most gratifying. It may stimulate the exertions of those engaged in Sunday schools, to know, that he attributes it himself to the attention he received when a cabin-boy, from a worthy clergyman in England. He was a native of Newfoundland and received as fair an education as his highly respectable parents could themselves give him in a little out-harbour.  

When Mr James took him at six in the morning through drenching rain in an open boat the twenty-four miles out the Bay to Little Harbour (Little Port) and Bateau Cove (Bottle Cove), Wix mentioned being very kindly treated by the French who were fishing there and had six brigs moored, one of them a vessel of 350 tons. That night he slept on the floor at Little Harbour in the house of Mr James’s sister. As there was virtually no permanent settlement here at this time, it is probable that this lady and her family moved elsewhere, perhaps further into the Bay, for the winter months; or they may have remained to look after the fishing installations during the off-season.

In spite of Archdeacon Wix’s concern about the need for clergy and teachers on the West Coast (by this time there were significant numbers of them in East Coast locations) several more decades elapsed before any denominations appointed permanent clergy for Bay of Islands communities. However as the records show, by about 1850 both Anglican and RC clergy were becoming established in some parts of the West Coast, particularly Bay St George where resident clergy were stationed. Of necessity the clergy also visited around their parishes, although not very often, but at least a presence was being established, and it was appreciated by the settlers who responded keenly. Unfortunately Newfoundland could not provide all of the financial support required for this church expansion, but both RC and Anglicans received assistance from their respective missionary organisations overseas.

3. Early Settlement, Industry, and the Church

In 1857 Captain Kelly of the schooner Alice, visiting Lark Harbour on business for the Newfoundland

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government, reported:

There are no permanent residents in this harbour. Some five or six families from the entrance of the River Humber come here during the summer for the purpose of fishing, the catch of which here is very small. There are ten French brigs and seven schooners from St Pierre in the bay. 54

Rev Ulric Zuinglius Rule, the first priest of the Bay of Islands Anglican Mission, made a similar statement about the location of settlers in 1865 on his first visit to the Bay:

... the bulk of the inhabitants of Bay of Islands lived not in the actual bay, but along the shores of the estuary of the river Humber, which flows into the main arm of the Bay. 55

The location referred to by Captain Kelly and U Z Rule is the stretch of shoreline along both sides of the Humber Arm from the mouth of the Humber River westwards to the present community of Frenchman’s Cove, (now part of the Town of Humber Arm South) including the communities of Birchy Cove (Curling) and “The Beach” (John’s Beach, the earliest settlement on that stretch of shoreline) on the south side, and Meadows, Gillams, Summerside and McIvers on the north side. This fiord-like section of the inner Bay is the Humber Arm. Where the Humber Arm opens into the Outer Bay is also Woods Island, a sizable flat island which by the 1880s had become a thriving community with a Roman Catholic church and resident priest, a school, a hotel, two lobster canning factories and several commercial enterprises. This community flourished long before the present City of Corner Brook existed, until the decades after World War Two when its population began to resettle on the Newfoundland mainland, and now it has no permanent residents, although there are numerous “cabins” there belonging to local people, many of whom once lived there. 56

The southern shore, from Halfway Point to Frenchman’s Cove, is now a single incorporated municipality, the Town of Humber Arm South, a narrow ribbon of settlement with a few short side roads. These communities were already inhabited when U Z Rule arrived. They are situated on a shore line which is not only more sheltered from the violent winds which frequently assail the exposed outer regions of the Bay, but they also offered less exposure to the view of the French naval vessels which occasionally ventured into the bays when they patrolled the area, making those places less comfortable for English settlers. American


55 Rule, U Z, Rev: Reminiscences of My Life, Dicks & Co Ltd, St John’s, 1927, p23. (“reminiscenses” spelled thus)

56 It is difficult to obtain precise population figures for Woods Island since it was a relatively small island with strong links to family members living on the shores of the Bay, and people would often remain there overnight if bad weather came up. However, Census figures are 1921 - 411 persons; 1935 - 394; 1945 - 283, illustrating a steady decline which accelerated in the 1960s when the Provincial Resettlement Program was introduced.
privateers also were known to be marauders around these shores, sometimes taking advantage of the lack of governmental presence and the less-than-amicable relations between the USA and England. But by the 1860s there had been a good salmon fishery in this area for a number of years, and this, along with the usually plentiful herring, fur and timber resources, made the area attractive and the risk worthwhile for the settlers.

U Z Rule mentions being warmly welcomed on his arrival by two men, “Strickland and Maurice Derigan”, of ‘The Beach’ (John’s Beach). Both names Derigan (now Darrigan) and Strickland (variant Stickland) are still represented in the area. This populated stretch of shore also includes Cook’s Brook, a small estuary some few kilometres west of Corner Brook on the south shore of the Humber Arm. According to the late Mr Robert J Park (1912-1995), resident of Lark Harbour:

The first permanent settler in Lark Harbour was my grandfather Will Park. His family and him had lived in Cook’s Brook before this but would come to Lark Harbour in the summer to fish. He then decided to come and live in the place. Just before he got shifted out a family of Blanchards came. They stayed on the point of Big Brook. Mr Park built a log cabin on top of what is now called Park’s Lane [Park & Youden Road]. Later he built a house where mine is located. 57

Traces of post holes are still visible in the ground at the location of his grandfather’s log cabin “on top of what is now called Park’s Lane”. His narrative of the arrival of his grandfather’s family agrees with the accounts of Kelly and Rule. Since Will Park would have been a youngish family man around 1860, his may have been one of those families to whom the Captain referred as migrating to the outer part of the Bay to fish in season. So at least two families had apparently established themselves in Lark Harbour by the early 1860s, and Rule also mentions one family living in Little Harbour (Little Port) in 1865.

As the cod fishery began to develop (because of the French Treaty rights cod had been off limits to English fishermen, but they fished cod anyway), so did the necessity to move closer to those fishing grounds. While both seasonal and permanent migration to places further out the Bay like Lark Harbour increased rapidly, the cod fishery continued to grow until about 1875, with average catches of about 30 quintals per fisherman. When after 1875 a commercial herring fishery drove it into eclipse, cod production fell to about 10 quintals 58 per fisherman, but it continued to involve residents of the Bay. In 1874, Bay of Islands fishermen had caught 9,860 quintals of cod and 34,325 barrels of herring; by 1901 the cod catch was halved to 4,825 quintals, but the herring almost doubled to 73,313 barrels. Over the same period, the salmon catch

57 Mollon, D H: A Review of the History of the Community of Lark Harbour with particular emphasis on the role of Merchants and the Impact of the Sea. Unpublished term paper, MUN, 1987. p6. Mr Robert Park, who lived most of his life in Lark Harbour and was a grandson of the original settler Will Park, died in 1995. His house, since demolished, was located about 100 metres from the shore.

58 A quintal is a weight of 112 pounds, for salt fish and similar commodities. It is equal to the old English “hundredweight”. 
declined by a great margin, from 958 barrels to 114, perhaps because of overfishing or lack of conservation, but a large and profitable lobster industry then developed. This demand for lobsters to feed a growing export market employed numerous fishermen, and the dozen or so canneries around the Bay of Islands also employed many women and even children as the income from this work was appreciably better than the older fisheries.

Beginning with a demand for bait which was sold to the larger fishing vessels when they arrived from Europe, but gradually becoming an industry with great export value, the herring fishery was largely a winter activity from January to March, with lesser efforts in the spring months of May and June, but increasing again in the fall. It could also provide a food supply at a time when other stocks might be depleted. This winter emphasis was good, because it acted as an economic cushion at a time when other activities were minimal. On the negative side, however, the effects of a poor herring fishery could be nearly disastrous as was the case when there was a notable downturn in herring catches for some six to ten years around 1880. 

Settlement in the early 1800s in the Bay of Islands was both sparse and limited. When U Z Rule arrived in the Bay he noted the extremely scattered nature of the population, for which reason he made his headquarters at Birchy Cove:

I think that arrangements must have been made ... that I should be received and housed in Birchy Cove by a little colony of migrants who had just come there from St George’s Bay. This was a wise plan for here was a small settlement of people accustomed to the routine of church life, and moreover in a neighbourhood which, though sparsely peopled, was yet more populous than any other ... But it certainly was not central. Meadows Point would have been fairly so: but the population there was far too scant for a head station. The problem was solved in due course by my making my headquarters in Birchy Cove and there building the first church, and establishing a second centre with a School Chapel at John’s Beach.

The population of the Bay of Islands consisted in my time partly of the old established settlers of English race scattered chiefly along the middle and lower parts of the estuary of the Humber, with a very few families in the Middle Arm of the Bay and one at Little Harbour; partly of recent immigrants who established themselves in the middle and upper parts of the estuary. 

4. The Bay of Islands Anglican Mission

The church had so far exercised little influence in the lives of the people of Bay of Islands. A few intrepid clergy such as Archdeacon Wix had visited the area, but there had been no permanent presence. Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy based on Sandy Point, the main community in the Bay St George area, made some visits to the Bay of Islands, but generally the church presence had been meagre. The entire Anglican Church


60 Rule, pp24-25. Meadows, on the North Shore, would have been a bad choice, as within a few years the railway was constructed through Birchy Cove (now Curling).
in Newfoundland had been a missionary effort supported from England by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (the SPG) until 1737 when it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Nova Scotia. Then in 1839 the Diocese of Newfoundland was established with the appointment of Rev Aubrey George Spencer as bishop. But the area of his responsibility was gigantic, consisting of the Island of Newfoundland, the entire Peninsula of Labrador and, surprisingly, the Bermuda Islands.

However the influx of new settlers began slowly to draw attention to the West Coast of the Island. Around the same time as the Bay of Islands Anglican Mission was established, the Roman Catholic Church also set up its ministry in the Bay, on Woods Island. Economically, the area could not fully support clergy on its own, but with financing from the SPG the Anglican Church set up a supported mission to cover the Bay of Islands and Bonne Bay. In 1865 Rev Ulric Zuilingius Rule, an Englishman, was appointed pastor. This was the same year that a Halifax lumber firm, Silver and Company, set up a sawmill on the site of the present Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Mill, whose predecessor, after several changes of ownership, it became. Things were beginning to happen in the Bay of Islands, although social progress would remain painfully slow until the next century due to the onerous prohibitions placed on the region since 1713 by the old Treaties of Utrecht, Paris and Versailles.

At one time undecided about whether to select the Bay of Islands or the more northern Bonne Bay as the location for the headquarters of his mission, U Z Rule states that the Bay of Islands “certainly had the larger population, but the population was very sadly scattered”. At that time most communication was by sea, so that from such a consideration neither bay had an advantage over the other. Bonne Bay had been settled slightly longer than the Bay of Islands, but in the end Rule opted for the Bay of Islands, choosing the settlement of Birchy Cove (later Curling) as the headquarters of his mission. In the remaining years of the century his choice was vindicated when the Newfoundland Railway selected the Bay of Islands as its first stop on the West Coast. This ensured that the communities on the south side of the mouth of the Humber River, chiefly Birchy Cove at that time, would be the ones to develop most in the ensuing years. Communities on the north side, including Summerside where the Petipas family and others had established shipping businesses, had also become quite prosperous, as had some in Bonne Bay, but as in so many places the advent of a railway line meant increased prosperity, while those who missed out would gradually decline.

The Mission was received enthusiastically by the people who were plainly lacking almost any form of social leadership, and it was not long before the churches, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, became influential and great contributing forces in the lives of their parishioners. U Z Rule has some interesting comments about the level of education he found among some of the people in his new mission locality. He
was impressed by the fact that a good number of people could read, which he attributes to the man Maurice Derigan who had met him at John’s Beach on his arrival. Derigan was a man with some education, for Rule recounts that he was told that “all of these original settlers who could either read or write had learnt it either directly from him [Derigan], or from someone whom he had taught.” It has always been a common feature of small and isolated communities that one person has the potential to exercise enormous influence for good, and Maurice Derigan was one such in his neighbourhood. The early interest in both church and school at John’s Beach may well have owed much to his efforts.  

But there was another, less positive, side to the picture too, which illustrates an effect of the extreme isolation many of the people had endured, often for several generations:

I had myself from time to time to teach some elder people to say by heart the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed. On one occasion in one of the smaller settlements, when I was discoursing on our Lord’s crucifixion, a woman asked me “Was he alive when they did that to Him?” Such ignorance was however exceptional.  

Such large-scale ignorance of religious matters would not be surprising today, but in mid nineteenth century British North America it was relatively unusual.

By the early 1860s the “Church Ship” with Newfoundland’s second Anglican Bishop, Edward Feild, on board for a visitation of the West Coast, had reported nineteen baptisms at Lark Harbour of children ranging in age from eighteen months to eighteen years, including one family of six children. Permanent residents were clearly moving into the Outer Bay of Islands, and in quite appreciable numbers. Increasing population therefore made the construction of church and school buildings a priority, but financing, especially in Newfoundland, was a traditional problem, and especially so in the Bay of Islands, the ‘Forgotten Bay’. 

Visits by the clergy in the early days of the Mission were minimal due to the difficulty of travelling around the numerous small settlements scattered along hundreds of miles of rugged coastline. Often only two or three families of father, mother and children all working at the fishery, had made their homes in a small isolated cove close to their fishing ground. They received few visits by the clergy or anyone else, but most welcomed the sacraments of baptism, marriage and burial. With no available medical help, stillbirths and early infant deaths occurred far too frequently, and there are recorded instances of families where less than half of the children survived. William A Gabriel (1857-1945), whose parents had emigrated from England to

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61 It is interesting to note that the early communities tended to be almost exclusively of one or the other denomination, with few exceptions, usually depending on which clergy had been the first to visit the place. In the case of Lark Harbour, it was Rev U Z Rule. However York Harbour, populated around the 1890s by families from the Codroy area who brought their religion with them, was originally Roman Catholic. This distinction began to fade as intermarriage between people of neighbouring settlements began. Usually, but not always, in such cases the children would be raised in the mother’s faith. 

Newfoundland in 1859 was teacher, postmaster and lay reader in Lark Harbour during the years 1892-1906. His wife Mary gave birth to fourteen children between 1878 and 1912, nine of whom were either stillborn or died before their third birthdays. Three of their children died while the family lived in Lark Harbour. Presumably they were buried in Lark Harbour Cemetery where there are several small graves, obviously of children, but sadly none are identified as belonging to Gabriel children. When infant mortality rates were as high as this in a relatively developed community like Lark Harbour, far worse conditions must have existed in the more isolated small coves such as those in North Arm or Penguin Arm where usually only one or two families lived. Support even from a self-taught midwife who might be called to assist in any medical emergency was a rare thing. 

In the larger settlements like Lark Harbour the ordained minister, whose visits to communities in his enormous territory were understandably quite rare, arranged for a suitable man, usually a male teacher if there was one, to conduct services in his absence. But life and death went on despite the lack of a priest, and this lay person performed religious functions as necessary. Then, on the clergyman’s next visit, these ceremonies would be validated. Nineteenth century and even later church registers contain many entries of which the one below, in the *Bonne Bay Anglican Marriage Records*, is typical. Note particularly the italicised section in brackets:

Marriage No. 017  CHILDES and MATTHEWS  1873 Oct 16
George CHILDES of Bonne Bay, bachelor and Louisa MATTHEWS of the same place, spinster, were married by me this sixteenth day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy three, (the said George CHILDS and Louisa MATTHEWS having been married by James BALLAM, a layman, there being at the time no clergyman resident, or to be found, in the place, on the seventh day of June last, according to a custom prevailing on the shore). Edward BOTWOOD, Clerk in Holy Order. The above marriage was solemnized between us; his mark X George CHILDES and her mark X Louisa MATTHEWS. In the presence of us; his mark Solomon CHILDES, her mark X Priscilla CHILDES, his mark X John QUICK, his mark X Charles MOORES.

In a letter of 1866 October 06, only a year after his arrival, U Z Rule spoke of a school-chapel being built at The Beach. It was in use the following year, but it was some years before it was finished. In Birchy Cove a church, dedicated to St Mary, was consecrated on 1871 July 30. Unfortunately a new Rectory at Birchy Cove was destroyed by fire in 1870, with the loss of all the church records to that time.

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64 This entry is from the records of Bonne Bay which was part of the Bay of Islands Mission for many years. Rev Edward Botwood, after whom the central Newfoundland town of Botwood is named, conducted this marriage after the departure of Rev U Z Rule and before the arrival of Rev James John Curling, the next incumbent at the Bay of Islands Mission. There are many similar records extant.
Rev Rule gives us a glimpse of the kind of schedule he followed in his scattered parish in the mid 1860s. His plan was probably quite typical of clergy working in isolated Newfoundland outports at that time, and it allows us to understand why these men, far from their own families and loved ones, often lonely in their dedication to duty, were held in such great esteem by their parishioners. His practice was to spend a period of perhaps several weeks in each locality, and no doubt he followed a similar schedule in each place. The school teaching provided by men like U Z Rule and a few very rare educated laymen like Maurice Derigan, or James Ballam in the above-quoted example, was the only academic education the young people of areas like the Bay of Islands received, and in it grew the seeds of the education system reflecting the partnership between church and government which persisted in Newfoundland until a non-denominational school system was instituted (after necessary changes were made in the British North America Act as it related to Newfoundland) for the 1998-1999 school year.  

Every morning but Sunday, school for the children taught by myself, after matins; every evening, catechizing for the young men or young women alternately before or after evensong: Wednesday and Friday evenings a sermon: Sunday afternoon before service catechizing for all young men and women. 

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65 Changes had to be made in the BNA Act as it related to Newfoundland. See page 87 and Term 17 of the BNA Act.

66 Rule, p36.
Providing elementary education to the children of the parish could not be a priority for a man in U Z Rule’s position if he was to fulfil the role for which he had been appointed, so teachers were engaged where possible, and the priest assumed a supervisory role. With the responsibility of serving the spiritual needs of dozens of small isolated settlements accessible only by boat or by arduous land travel, he could not hope to spend more than a week or two per year at each one. Perhaps the most amazing thing is that he managed to find the opportunity to teach at all during his pastoral visits.

U Z Rule served in the Bay of Islands Mission for eight years. When he left in 1873 he was briefly replaced by Rev E Botwood who served for part of 1873, and then by Joseph James Curling, from 1873 to 1888. Curling was a young Englishman, an officer of the British Army in Bermuda, which was then a joint administration with the Diocese of Newfoundland, and it was there that he and Bishop Feild met. Immediately the two men, both dedicated to their chosen professions, sensed that quality in each other, and J J Curling, still a military officer on active service, resigned his commission and returned to England where he entered theological training to prepare himself to become the next priest of the Bay of Islands Mission. During his fifteen year tenure, Rev Curling, not always in the best of health, became one of the most respected and admired Anglican clergy ever to serve on Newfoundland’s West Coast. He was renowned not just for his Christian example and devotion, but also for his boundless energy and many practical capabilities including his proficiency as a mariner, a skill of which he made extensive use when travelling round his huge pastoral charge.

An incident from the early days of Rev Curling’s ministry is narrated by his one-time commanding officer, lifelong friend and biographer, Colonel R H Jelf, RE, in his book The Life of J. J. Curling, Soldier and Priest. It illustrates well the kind of man the young priest was, and is best told in the Colonel’s own words:

The charter of the schooner Velocity, which had taken him [Rev Curling] to his Mission, was to expire on the date of the vessel’s ultimate return to St John’s. Early in January, 1874, Curling having no further need of the vessel, ordered the Captain to take her back. He duly started, and sailed away down the harbour, twelve miles or so long. Some days afterwards Curling heard that the vessel had not got out to sea, so he took a small fishing boat and sailed down after her. Arrived at the mouth of the harbour, he found the Captain had anchored, declaring he could get no further as the ice was already closing round his vessel. Of course this would mean being frozen in for some 3 or 4 months on full pay, virtually at the expense of the Mission. “Oh! nonsense,” said Curling, “I’ll sail her out for you, if you are afraid,” and sail her out he did, in the teeth of the fast closing ice, taking her out into the open sea and bringing her some 100 miles on the way to St John’s to Channel [on the southwest corner of the Island] ... Thence he walked back some 50 miles over the snow, to Bay of Islands, his first tramp in snow-shoes! I think this plucky act, showing on one hand his able seamanship, and on the other a determination not to be “done”, raised him immensely in the estimation of the fisherfolk, who promptly decided that “Parson Curling” was one of the right sort.
The churches which have operated in Newfoundland, regardless of denomination, have all played major positive roles in the lives of the people. As well as the work of the Anglican priests UZ Rule and JJ Curling, both of whom contributed immensely to the lives of the people, it should also be noted that the Roman Catholic Church played a very major role in bringing about improvements in conditions for the settlers in the Bay of Islands. Notable among the RC clergy was Monsignor Thomas Sears who ministered to the West Coast from 1868 to 1885. As in the Anglican Mission, the Bay of Islands was only part of his pastoral charge, his centre of operations being Sandy Point in Bay St George. However from his arrival in 1868 he made tremendous efforts to improve the conditions and quality of life of all residents of the West Coast, not only Roman Catholics. In these remote and still neglected regions it was often necessary for the clergy to take firm stands against abuses they identified, and Monsignor Sears did just that. Commenting on the injustices suffered by West Coast settlers due to the Treaties, he had this to say in a letter dated at Grand River, Codroy, 15 April 1879, to WJ Donnelly, MHA. The capitalised sentence is thus in the original:

... it is an injustice to the rapidly increasing population of this most important part of our Colony to deprive them of free trade with the neighbouring Colonies, in a word, to tax them equally with the other Colonists, even to tax them without representation (but this would be endured for a time). But to tax them and then turn round and tell them coolly that they are to participate no more in these taxes till Great Britain will do so and so. This is, to say the least of it, an act of injustice that bids fair to find a parallel in the history of civilized Legislation. What! is the population of these parts to be taxed and then not allowed to derive any benefits from these taxes till England and France will make a new Treaty regarding the rights of the latter on these shores? Why, this may require scores, nay hundreds of years, as all former endeavours of the kind may amply prove, and we to pay taxes all this time and no more money is to be expended on our Coast. OF ALL THE MISLEGISLATION EVER KNOWN IN HISTORY THIS IS THE MOST UNJUST ...... There is another remark of yours that I would like to call your attention to, viz: ‘That the Legislature looks upon money expended on this Coast as money thrown away.’ I am really astonished at so honourable a body of men entertaining such an idea.  

Father Sears then went on to castigate Mr Donnelly and his associates over the niggardly appropriations they had allocated for the upkeep of social and civil institutions on the West Coast, and finally he accused the Legislature of attempting to use the inhabitants of the French Shore as pawns in their efforts to coerce Britain to accede to their wishes. Unfortunately, his accusations were fundamentally correct. As well as these complaints, the Monsignor made it his business to draw public and legislative attention to many other basic needs of the West Coast colonists, including roads, agriculture, education, the timber and mineral industries,

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67 From a draft found among the papers of Monsignor Sears, and quoted by Brosnan in Pioneer History of St George’s Diocese, Newfoundland. Mission Press, Toronto, 1948. pp68-69. WJS Donnelly, a businessman, to whom the Monsignor addressed his remarks, was one of the two Members of the House of Assembly for Placentia and St Mary’s for the 1878 and 1882 sessions.
and of course the fishing industries themselves. One has to question how seriously Mr Donnelly took his District responsibilities as a Member of the Newfoundland House of Assembly!

Few places have enjoyed the support of so dedicated and enlightened a man as Monsignor Thomas Sears. It is interesting to note that when J J Curling returned from a trip to England with a small sailing ship which he had purchased there with his own funds to use for transportation around his parish, he habitually invited Monsignor Sears, who was not so well equipped, to travel with him. Sears accepted the offer on several occasions and reported this neighbourly working relationship in a letter to his own superiors:

This gentleman had the urbanity to offer me a passage in his yacht any time we should be going in the same direction. I have availed myself of the offer. 68

In 1877 HMS Eclipse reported that twelve new settlers had arrived in Little Port, obtaining average catches of twenty to thirty quintals of fish, good salmon catches, and good crop yields. 69 In the same year, Rev Rule, who by then had left and been replaced by Rev J J Curling, relates the latter’s description of improvements made to the various church establishments in the area:

Mr Curling writing me in September, 1877, gave me an account of church building in the mission at that time. He mentioned an enlargement of the old school house in Birchy Cove, which was then used for Sunday School and singing practices; and a good-sized school house, and master’s home at Sprucey Point. The school chapel at the Beach had been enlarged; he also mentioned a parsonage and school room there: also a school-chapel and small parsonage or schoolmaster’s house at Lark Harbour; also he spoke of the finished school-chapel at Birchy Head, Bonne Bay, and a small parsonage: and a school-chapel at Rocky Harbour; and a dwelling house in course of construction: and a school-chapel in course of construction at Cow Head. 70

Cow Head, near the northern boundary of the present Gros Morne National Park, and some 130km/80 miles from the Mission headquarters at Birchy Cove, was probably the most northerly point served regularly by the Mission, but when Rev Curling acquired his little sailing vessel, it is likely that he expanded his area of coverage. Certainly by 1877, eight years from the founding of the Mission and three years or so into Curling’s time of service, the construction of facilities around the Mission was well under way, but not before time. In comparison, some schools had existed on the East Coast of Newfoundland since 1800.

69 Mollon, D H.
70 U Z Rule, p34.
5. Failure of the Cod and Herring Fisheries 1879-1880

During the autumn of 1879, both the cod and herring fisheries in the Bay of Islands suffered a major decline. Weather conditions were extremely cold, making fishing difficult and dangerous, and the catches of both species declined to a level where fishermen were unable to provide for their families. In those times of course no formal government assistance existed, so the men addressed the only source of help that they knew: their Church, which during the last twenty or so years had become a major force in the community. In early December 1889 a letter was addressed to Rev J J Curling, Anglican Priest of the Bay of Islands Mission, by the heads of thirty-two families faced with starvation in the dead of winter.

To the Revd J J Curling
Revd Sir
Owing to the entire failure of the Herring fishery and partial failure of the Cod fishery and our inability to procure work we are now in absolute want of the Bare necessities to Sustain life and viewing the present prospects we must some of us long ere the coming long winter is over Succumb to Starvation.
We gratefully acknowledge your individual efforts in our behalf in the past and the knowledge that the good you may volunteer may not be Sufficient to carry us through Therefore we humbly beseech you to represent our case to the Government to come to our aid (as individual efforts cannot save us) to give us work so we can earn ever so little to give us Bread. With many grateful thanks for your past benefices we pray you will do all in your power to assist us through the proper authorities.
Yours in necessity . . .

The letter was signed by the heads of thirty-two Bay of Islands families who depended for their living on the fisheries, and who were threatened with starvation if help was not forthcoming. Rev Curling responded very promptly to the petitioners with the following reply from his Mission Station at John's Beach:

To John Bailey, M. Compagnon Jr and others who addressed me early in December 1879.
My friends,
It grieved me very much to hear of your distress owing to the failure of the herring fishery, & the partial failure of the Cod fishery.
I at once represented the case to the Magistrate 72, who wrote to the Government requesting them to send provisions and to authorize some public work being undertaken during this winter.
A petition was also forwarded to the Government from some of the fishermen residing in the upper part of this Sound stating their distress; the Rev. P. Doe???? & the Rev D. Creelman, I believe, as well as myself certify the truth of this petition.
Before the last mail steamer left St. John's the Government heard by Telegraph that some

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71 The original of this letter and the response of Rev J J Curling may be seen in the Scrapbook of Rev Curling, the property of the Congregation of St Mary's Anglican Church, Curling, Corner Brook, in the Archives of the Diocese of Western Newfoundland. The complete list of names of the Petitioners may be viewed in the Appendix pages.

72 By this time rudimentary civil administration had been established with the appointment of a magistrate at Birchy Cove.
herring were being caught in the B. of Islands and on that account refrained from sending any provisions.  
We are therefore thrown upon our own resources, and the Magistrate has summoned a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Bay to be held at the Co. Ho [Community House] next Wed. 30th inst to consider how best to provide for those in distress.  
Some relief work will certainly be given.  
Meanwhile I would exhort you to be in... prayer to our Heavenly FATHER that it would please Him to provide for His Children, and if He see fit, to send a sufficient supply of Herring.  
'Put thou thy trust in the LORD and be ... Good. Dwell i.e. (live righteously) in the land and verily thou shalt be fed.  
Your faithful servant in CHRIST,  
J. J. Curling,  
John's Beach, Bay of Islands.  
19 December 1879.  

To our modern ears the language of Curling’s reply may sound patronising, but on the other hand the letter indicates that efforts were being made to provide assistance to these people and their families who were about to be faced with a miserable Christmas and ensuing winter. At the same time the peremptory decision of the government in St John’s shows clearly that those in power had a very limited understanding of the situation in the Bay of Islands. But the matter did not stop there. By this time the Bay of Islands had received the appointment of a Magistrate, although his powers were a reduced version of those of his counterparts in Eastern Newfoundland.  

After the refusal of the government to provide any relief, the Magistrate, Commander William Howorth, R.N., J.P., set up a committee to receive pledges and donations from the better-off members of the community, but apparently this was not successful either. Howorth therefore sent the following letter to the Colonial Secretary in St John's, on 16 January 1880.  

Sir,  
In my letter of December 5th, I informed you that in the absence of herring and in consequence of the bad summer fishery there was a strong probability of there being great distress in this bay. I regret to have now to report that my worst fears have been realized. The ice made in this part of the bay on December 26th, but as yet there have been no herring caught and apprehensions exist that there is not sufficient provisions in the bay to meet the requirements of the people.  
As I received no answer to my letter on the 31 instant, I called a public meeting to ascertain the actual state of things and to see what could be done towards relieving the terrible distress that prevailed. I ascertained at this meeting that there were at the time at least 40 families absolutely destitute.  
The following resolution was proposed by the Rev. J. J. Curling and seconded by the Rev. D. Creelman [Methodist minister], and carried unanimously.  

“That in the present urgent need for the relief of about 40 families who are absolutely destitute, subscriptions be solicited from the residents of the bay
to provide provisions to pay for work, which shall be remunerative as far as possible on the strict understanding that the government be urgently requested to [refund] that which has [been] expended and that subscriptions be returned in proportion to such government repayment.

“The following to be a committee to collect subscriptions: Mr Tupper, Rev D Creelman, Captain Weir, Mr. Bagg, Captain Evitt, Mr. Buck, Mr. T. Carter.”

As yet this appeal has been unproductive. I have instituted relief works under regulations, a copy of which I append, which I hope may prove self supporting. The greater number of those relieved are employed carving pine plank.

There are at present 49 families numbering 285 persons dependent entirely upon these works. I have the honour to be your obedient servant.

William Howorth.

6. Further Settlement

In the mid nineteenth century, fishermen from St Malo, France, were still frequenting the waters of Newfoundland, as they had since before the time of Jacques Cartier. Conditions on board the ships were often very uncomfortable, even appalling, and it was not uncommon for members of the crew to desert, although there could be dire consequences for the deserter, who would usually be pursued and severely punished if caught. One interesting narrative relates to a young St Malo man who “jumped ship”, took up residence in Lark Harbour, married a local girl and established another family name, Mollon, derived from the name of the town of his origin. (It is interesting to note that many of the local people still pronounce the name as “Mollo”, closer to the French pronunciation.) Other family names arriving in this period were: Sheppard and Youden (Spaniard’s Bay), Childs (Bonne Bay), Joyce (Placentia Bay), Druggett (Jersey, Channel Islands, UK), Gilbert and Park (Eastern Newfoundland). For many of these people Eastern Newfoundland was a way stop, sometimes brief, sometimes for a few generations, and for some a final home after working in the seasonal fishery of Labrador for several years.

The population of the Bay of Islands and Bonne Bay was increasing considerably, and so was the general level of prosperity among the people, despite setbacks such as the failure of the fishery described earlier. By 1884 the population of Lark Harbour itself had reached 77, and by 1891 Lark Harbour and Bottle [Bateau] Cove together were home to 135 people.

A report in the Journal of the Legislature states that as of 1871 July 11 there were no inhabitants at

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73 This letter of Magistrate Howorth to the Colonial Secretary is quoted in full in Rev Charles S Costello's research paper Distress Strikes Bay of Islands, from Twelve Articles on the History and Economic Development of the Bay of Islands, Newfoundland, published March 1972-February 1973 in Diocesan Review, Edward Vincent Chafe, February 1973. The text of the Regulations to be applied to the Relief Program, and the List of the Petitioners may also be viewed in the Appendix pages.
York Harbour. Settlement here in that harbour began in the late 1890s with fishermen who migrated from further west along the coast. Among the first of these, from Codroy, were the Samms brothers, Thomas and Charles, who are reported to have established permanent homes in York Harbour by 1898; and the Robinson brothers, Ben, Reuben, and Stephen, about a year later. About the same time John Cammie (Camus) and Joe Vincent also arrived with their families from the Magdalen Islands via Bay St George. By the late 1920s about ten families were living in York Harbour: Samms, Robinson, Cammie, Vincent, Kendell, Byrne, Wheeler and Jesso. Broom’s Bottom, or “The Bottom”, as York Harbour is sometimes known, had been the site of a lobster packaging operation around 1830. It was owned and operated by a Mr Broom whose main base was in the Codroy area, and it may have been the stimulus for the later migration and settling of these families in the York Harbour area.

7. A Note on Family Names

The names of some of these families—Robinson, Kendell, Byrne, Wheeler—are still represented in York Harbour while others, such as Cammie, are not, although many of their descendants still reside in the Bay of Islands region. A similar situation exists in Lark Harbour where the recurrent names are Sheppard, Childs, Youden, Park, Gilbert, Joyce, Darrigan, Drugett. There have of course been numerous intermarriages between the offspring of the original settlers of both communities, but the two communities, Lark Harbour and York Harbour, have long and keenly guarded their independence from each other. Each community also has its own individual character despite their sharing of a church for more than a century, and a school for half a century. Perhaps this independence may be partially explained by the fact that as groups of settlers they originated basically from different regions, different ethnic backgrounds and different living experiences. Many of the original Lark Harbour settlers arrived from eastern Newfoundland where the main immigration was from southwestern England and the main economic activity was fishing, while the York Harbour ancestors tended to be descended from Cape Bretoners who brought with them a strong agricultural tradition and somewhat different linguistic backgrounds. However in the final analysis both groups were of European descent, either British or French, and the linguistic lines were often blurred.

The St James Church, Lark Harbour, consecrated in 1878, located at the lower end of the Cemetery. It was badly damaged in a wind storm about 1960 and was demolished and replaced with the present building which was consecrated in 1962.

Picture courtesy Mrs Frances Childs.

The present St James Church, Lark Harbour, built in 1962, picture in 1996.
RULES
FOR THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DAY SCHOOLS,
Bay of Islands Mission,
DIocese of NEWFOUNDLAND.

I.—The hours of attendance are from 9 to 12 A.M., and from 2 to 4 P.M., on every week-day except Saturday, and these days referred to in the following Rule.

II.—There will be School for Religious Instruction only, on Festivals and Holy Days.

III.—School will be opened and concluded with Prayer, and the first hour of each day will be devoted to Religious Instruction. Attendance during Prayers and Religious Instruction is not obligatory, but Parents or Guardians are required to inform the School-Master if their children are to be excused.

IV.—The School Fees are as follows:—

$2.00 each year for the 1st Child of the same Family;
$1.50 “ “ 2nd Child of the same Family; or a Child may be paid for Quarterly, at the rate of 60 cents a Quarter. The Quarters end upon Christmas Day, Lady Day, Midsummer Day, Michaelmas Day.

Any attendance will involve payment for the whole Quarter.

V.—No Child under Six Years of age, nor above Sixteen Years of age, is admitted.

VI.—Six weeks holidays will be given during the year.

VII.—The Parents of Children attending School are required to provide a due share of Firewood for the School and School-Master, and to take their part in cleaning the School House.

VIII.—A certain number of Prizes will be given, half-yearly, after Examination: 1st. For regularity in attendance. 2nd. For diligence in study.

JOSEPH J. CURLING,
Missionary Priest.

St. Mary's Parsonage, Bay of Islands,
Easter, 1879.

This notice prepared by Rev JJ Curling and contained in his Journal in the collection of the Archives of the Anglican Diocese of Western Newfoundland at Corner Brook was typical of the way schools were operated in the early days in Newfoundland. Students brought firewood for the heating not only of the school, but also of the teacher’s residence, and families were required to do their part of the cleaning, maintenance, and other janitorial services which might be needed.
1. Overview of the Early History of the Fishery

No precise date can be given for the arrival of the first European in the waters of Newfoundland, since the earliest voyagers were fishermen who generally did not keep accurate logs but had for a number of years been
Looking forward on the Matthew replica at 6am on the day she visited Lark Harbour, 1997 July 23

harvesting codfish from the bountiful waters of the Northwest Atlantic, and no doubt they returned with tales of ‘the new found land’. However the earliest reliable record is that of John Cabot, who sailed from Bristol, England, in 1497 in his tiny ship the Matthew and is believed to have made landfall in Bonavista in Eastern Newfoundland.

Cabot was not the first European to venture to Newfoundland: already a seasonal fishery had begun there, with ships arriving in Newfoundland waters in spring and returning to Europe in the fall. The fish was split, salted, and dried on land before being shipped to Europe, a system which quickly became an established pattern for the Newfoundland salt fish industry and persisted commercially for more than four centuries until the final decades of the twentieth century when salting succumbed to more modern methods of preservation that depended on higher technology.

2. Treaties: Utrecht (1713), Paris (1763), Versailles (1783)  

Two of the main participants in the industry, along with Spain and Portugal, were France and England whose

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76 The three Treaties are quite similar as regards their implications for Newfoundland. They represent efforts to keep up-to-date with changes, but they were always controversial. See page 11 for the differences significant for Newfoundland.
centuries-old hostilities continued unabated in the New World just as they did closer to home. Various treaties were made between the two, and some of the terms of those treaties impacted strongly on participants in the Newfoundland Fishery, especially those individuals who had become permanent residents of the Island.

Since the Battle of Hastings in 1066, relations between England and France had been at best tolerant and at worst in a state of open warfare. Periods such as the Hundred Years War (1337 - 1453) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803 - 1815) mark some of the more intense hostilities, but there has always been an undercurrent of suspicion which, even when relations looked good, was never far below the surface. The Treaties of Utrecht, Paris and Versailles were concerned with relations between the western world’s two most powerful countries on a worldwide scenario, and therefore it is hardly surprising that when a valuable industry developed around Newfoundland, an insignificant and remote outpost, it would easily become a currency negotiable for the convenience of both France and England.

From the earliest days of the Newfoundland Fishery, permanent settlement was actively discouraged at the behest of the English investors who ran the enterprise for their own gain, with minimal concern for those who did the hard work. The owners were well able to influence those who made the rules, and frequently they did so to the serious detriment of any who opposed them.

Colonies everywhere have had histories that were often violent and exploitative, and nowhere has this been more apparent than on the sections of Newfoundland coastline which came to be part of the “Treaty Shore” (also known as the “French Shore”) as determined under the three Treaties. (See maps p67.) Prohibition of coastal settlement was one trading ‘currency’ that was convenient and it was enforced as part of the Treaties by the navies of both France and England. Under the Treaties, rights associated with the fishing industry to certain sections of coastline were ceded to the French, while other sections remained to the English. In general the eastern half of the Island was subject to British dominance and the western half to France, although the English always maintained that control by France was subject to oversight of all of Newfoundland from England. This was a concept strenuously disputed by the French, and also one that should have had a patriotic appeal for the English, but such was not the case. This division of influence became a serious irritant for Newfoundland where it echoed down the centuries and came to be identifiable as the main cause of the delayed economic and social development of the entire Island until the introduction of Representative Government in 1832, and of the West Coast which was virtually enfranchised until 1904.

Although all three of the Treaties had negative influences on Newfoundland, it was the final one, 

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77 The hostilities between England and France stemmed from the Battle of Hastings of 1066 when King Harold of England was defeated by Prince William of Normandy. William was then crowned King of England but was never fully accepted as the rightful king. In the centuries that followed various leaders of both England and France attempted to regain the throne for themselves. The result was that the two countries were almost constantly at war with each other. Newfoundland was drawn into this conflict although she was never directly involved. The three Treaties were intended to maintain peace but various irritants continued to arise, affecting the people of Newfoundland in ways beyond their control.
Versailles, in 1783, that caused most trouble. At that time, because more settlers were now present on the Northeast Coast, but still relatively few on the West Coast, changes were made in the French coastline rights. The West Coast from Cape Ray on the SW corner of the Island northwards to the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula and then southwards following the coast as far as Cape St John to the east of White Bay, became enshrined by treaty as a joint fishing area for both England and France. (See maps, p67) Thus a length of coastline in excess of 700 kilometres became the “French Shore”. The West Coast, including the Bay of Islands, now constituted most of the French Shore, on the side of the Island as far as it was possible to get from the major concentrations of fishing which were based on the East Coast, South Coast, and Labrador. This may have been the main reason why the Bay of Islands and the West Coast in general, despite plentiful resources, were more inhibited than any other part of Newfoundland in every practical aspect of its development.

Before 1783 the West Coast was sparsely populated and therefore not much affected, but by the turn of the century settlers were beginning to arrive in increasing numbers from the East Coast, from Europe, and from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, until by 1850 Sandy Point in Bay St George had become a thriving commercial and social centre. However most of the Bay of Islands was still sparsely populated except for the inner reaches where the French had no interest.

The original Treaty of Utrecht (1713) defined certain rights and limits governing the behaviour of both parties, French and English:

> the French fishermen building only their scaffolds, confining themselves to the repair of their fishing vessels, and not wintering there; the subjects of His Britannic Majesty on their part not molesting in any manner the French fishermen during their fishing nor injuring their scaffolds during their absence.  

Judge D W Prowse, Newfoundland patriot, lawyer and historian, wrote:

> ... the original Treaty of Utrecht had a clear meaning: it gave the French a concurrent fishery, regulated and controlled exclusively by English authorities ... It is an elementary rule of international law that the sovereign power alone exercises authority within its own territory. Whatever rights France may have on the Newfoundland treaty shore, they must be carried out under English supervision and control; neither France nor any other foreign

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78 Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, Article XIII

79 Daniel Woodley Prowse (1834-1914) was called to the Newfoundland Bar in 1857 and in 1861 was elected to the House of Assembly for the South Coast district of Burgeo-La Poile. In 1867 he supported Ambrose Shea’s unsuccessful pro-confederation initiative with Canada. In 1869 Prowse was appointed a judge of the Central District Court, an appointment he held until his retirement in 1898. He had a sound legal training and expertise, and had acquired a strong knowledge of the Newfoundland Fishery through his personal involvement in his father’s business. His judgement of a document such as the Treaty of Utrecht and other government and legal papers must be respected. He was above all a patriotic Newfoundlander, unwilling to see his countrymen cheated of their patrimony. He was correct in his opinion that England did not properly enforce the rights of the Newfoundland fishermen, in part because it did not serve the interests of the Imperial Government at the time, and in part because the influence of the merchants remained strong. In 1895 he published his 800 page volume, A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records, which is recognised as the first major study of its kind and one of the most thorough.
power can exercise coercive jurisdiction on English territory.  

In 1832 the Imperial Parliament authorised a Colonial Legislature for Newfoundland, and one of the first concerns of that Legislature was to protect the Colony from measures passed by the Mother Country that would impinge negatively on Newfoundland. Major problems were the prohibition of settlement on the French or Treaty Shore and the methods applied under the Treaties to enforce it. All of this was strongly connected with the sovereignty of the Colony.

A joint Commission of British and French officials meeting in the 1840s had made certain recommendations governing the fishery. These recommendations were accepted by the governments of both nations in a Convention formulated in 1857. However the Newfoundland Legislature, which had not been party to any consultation, refused its assent. The Legislature argued with full justification that the new provisions substantially allowed French encroachment on the rights of Newfoundlanders (1) by giving exclusive rights to the French on the Treaty Shore, as well as concurrent rights to a large stretch of the Labrador shore; (2) by limiting the rights of Newfoundlanders to erect and maintain buildings on the French Shore; and (3) by conceding to French naval officers the power to enforce the terms of the earlier Treaty even to the point of expelling from the French Shore any Newfoundland vessels attempting concurrent fishing. The Newfoundland Legislature objected strongly in these words:

We deem it our duty, most respectfully, to protest in the most solemn manner against any attempt to alienate any portion of our fisheries or our soil to any foreign power, without the consent of the local legislature. As our fishery and territorial rights constitute the basis of our commerce and of our social and political existence, as they are our birthright and the legal inheritance of our children, we cannot under the circumstances, assent to the terms of the convention: we therefore earnestly entreat that the Imperial Government will take no steps to bring this Treaty into operation, but will permit the trifling privileges that remain to us to continue unimpaired.

As might be expected, the Legislature was not the only group offended by the British Government’s selling out of the Colony: everywhere there was intense public reaction. The Union Jack, the flag of the Empire, was lowered, and some Newfoundlanders raised the American Stars and Stripes. Judge Prowse himself characterised the British Government’s position as “this proposal to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage”.

Many West Coast residents, the most severely to be affected by this 1857 Convention with France if it should be applied, were discontented enough to petition for separation from Newfoundland and for confederation with Canada. Within ten years the British North America Act of 1867 would give birth to

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80 Prowse, History of Newfoundland, 1895, page 355

81 Newfoundland, Journals of the House of Assembly, 1857, p18

82 Prowse, History of Newfoundland, 1895, page 473
Canada, a topic already being debated in the Maritimes, with whom the West Coast of Newfoundland had fairly intimate dealings. However, in spite of internal pressure to do otherwise, the Mother Country upheld Newfoundland’s autonomy, and no longer pressed for acceptance of the Convention. A despatch from Mr H Labouchere, Secretary of State at Downing Street, contained the following words which have been called “The Magna Carta of Newfoundland”:

... the rights at present enjoyed by the community of Newfoundland are not to be ceded or exchanged without their assent ... the constitutional mode of submitting measures for that assent is by laying them before the Colonial Legislature.  

But the French Shore question was no closer to settlement now than before. Such was the political climate in 1876 when George Sheppard, fisherman of Lark Harbour, complained to Captain R M Lloyd, commander of HMS Bullfinch, about French harassment. Captain Lloyd reported the incident to his superior in the following terms, although with some doubts about its validity:

10 October, 1876

Sir,

1. I have the honour to bring to your notice a statement that was made to me by George Sheppard, fisherman, of Lark Harbour when I called off that port, on the 19 September, 1876.

2. I had stopped the ship off the harbour and gone ashore, to make some inquiries as to the loss of a schooner on the coast, when in course of conversation with George Sheppard, he stated that a French man-of-war (from his description the Laplace) had called in at Lark Harbour about one month previously, and sent an officer ashore, who, through an interpreter, a young man Legge, the son of the guardian of rooms at Little Port, who happened to be there, told him “they must stop fishing there and take down their buildings, and if this was not done when they came round again, they would do it for them.”

3. As I was detached from the ship, I was unable to take this man's deposition, but his statement was made in the presence of Michael Esmond, the permanent pilot of the Bullfinch and was confirmed by the man's brother, J. Sheppard. The other witnesses were absent, as was also the boy Legge, on whose story and interpretation the whole case hinges.

4. Being fully alive to the necessity of making anything that might take the form of a case of complaint against the French authorities, as definite and incontrovertible as possible and as this man's statement does not appear to me to be so, I have thought it better to inform you of the matter apart from my other reports.

5. I communicated the substance of this rumour to Mr. Carter the resident magistrate at the Bay of Islands with a view to his obtaining further information when practical.

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83 Despatch No. 10, 26 March 1857, from H Labouchere, Secretary of State, Downing Street, London, to Governor Darling, St John's, Newfoundland. It has sometimes been referred to as “the Labouchere Letter” and even as “The Magna Carta of Newfoundland”.

84 George Sheppard migrated to the Bay of Islands via Labrador, ‘the counterclockwise migration’. He was born at Spaniard’s Bay in 1837 and after a few years of fishing “on the Labrador” where in 1864 in Battle Harbour he married Susannah Vokey (1840-1930) also from Spaniard’s Bay, he and his brother Abraham settled in Lark Harbour. George became one of the first permanent residents and raised a large family with his wife Susannah (1840 - 1930). Many of their descendants still reside in the town. A successful fisherman and businessman in the community, George died on 1917 May 24 and he and Susannah are buried at Lark Harbour.
6. I respectfully submit, that I do not consider any charge can be brought against the French on this man’s story, whether sworn or otherwise; but I have thought it my duty to give you full information of such a statement having been made, as in any case, the officers on this station next season, could be forewarned of this rumoured interference on the part of the French, in a harbour where their people neither have rooms, nor exercise their rights of fishing.

I have &c.,
(signed) R. M. Lloyd, Commander

This incident illustrates the precarious position of the settlers who, as fishermen, chose to live in proximity to the sea where their homes were in full view of any approaching vessel. Although nothing actually came of the incident, the temerity of the settlers, the British navy’s doubts about the viability of Mr Sheppard’s complaint, and the French navy’s confidence in its own correctness, also suggest that the Treaty was being questioned by many of those involved. There is no evidence that the French ever made good their threat, but Mr Sheppard and the other residents of Lark Harbour may well have suffered some sleepless nights over it. Similar incidents occurred elsewhere on the West Coast around the same time, as this letter from the Commander of a Royal Navy vessel to a Mr Shearer who owned a factory at Port Saunders, illustrates:

“Bullfrog,” at Port Saunders
24 September 1887

Having received from Captain Humann, Senior French Naval Officer, Newfoundland, a notification to the effect that the fishing station of Keppel Island and Port Saunders has been allotted next year to one of their ships, and that the factory you work in Port Saunders will interfere very much with their fishing if carried on as at present, I have to inform you that you will continue working your factory next season at great risk, for on any reasonable complaint on the part of the French of your operations interfering with the full enjoyment of their fishing rights, your factory will be suppressed.

Mr Shearer, Port Saunders (Signed) J. Masterman Lieutenant & Commander

In June 1888 the owners of the Port Saunders factory were notified by the Captain of HMS Emerald, that they would not be allowed to take lobsters within certain limits because of complaints by the French that lobster trawls set by Newfoundland fishermen on some parts of the coast interfered with their operations.

In June 1889 the above prohibition was renewed by Sir Baldwin Walker, Captain and Senior Officer of HMS Emerald. On 17 June 1889 the French warship Bison had destroyed a quantity of lobster traps at Port Saunders, and in July another French warship destroyed a further 500 traps in the vicinity. These incidents elicited complaints made jointly by the two Houses of the Newfoundland Legislature to London on behalf of the victims. A few months later this was the reply by Lord Derby, Colonial Secretary in London, to the

85 This document is found in the Journal of the Council for 1887, and is quoted in full in Crocker, D, et al: History of the Bay of Islands; Western Region Library, Corner Brook. 1972.

Newfoundland Legislature’s Joint Address (Newfoundland, No. 67) :

Downing St.
9th Nov 1889

... the British declaration of 1793 declares that in order that the fishermen of the two nations may not give cause for daily quarrels, his Britannic Majesty will take the most positive measures for preventing his subjects from interrupting in any manner by their competition the fishing of the French during the temporary exercise of it which is granted to them upon the coasts of Newfoundland, and he will for this purpose cause the fixed settlements which shall be formed there to be removed. It is evident therefore, that the fishery of British fishermen, whether lobster or otherwise, must be carried on subject to the above restriction as to the non-interruption of the French fishery.

In response to recent events the Newfoundland Legislature appointed its own inquiry in 1890 into the rights which had been accorded to France in the three Treaties. Three Legislature members, James S Winter, Patrick J Scott and Alfred B Morine, were appointed to study the Treaty rights of the French as those rights affected the Newfoundland settlers, and in 1890 they prepared an informal report on their findings:— French Treaty Rights in Newfoundland: The Case for the Colony stated by the People’s Delegates. They referred to the Labouchere Letter of 1857 which had defined an obligation on the part of the British Government to require assent from the Legislature of Newfoundland when any change to the existing rights of the Colony might be contemplated, and had also defined in precise terms the manner in which that assent should be sought. No such assent had ever been given by the Newfoundland Legislature since the agreement had been presented to them as a fait accompli. In fact, Winter, Scott and Morine showed that recent actions by Britain had been in direct contravention of the Labouchere statement. Clearly there were radical inconsistencies between the rights accorded to Newfoundland on paper and the practices of the British authorities. Were these inconsistencies due to the demands of expediency, or to a change of policy from somewhere higher in the chain of authority? At the very least it hinted that the Newfoundland Legislature was being taken for

87 The term “British” used here is indicative that the British government in London saw no distinction between any fishermen from Britain who were not residents of the Colony and whose operations might reasonably be restricted in Newfoundland waters, and the many Newfoundland fishermen who were permanent long-term residents of the Colony but were not thus recognised.


89 These three men had all been members of the Legislature prior to 1890, but Alfred B Morine was the only current member, representing Bonavista. Patrick J Scott had represented St John’s West but had been defeated in 1889. James Spearman Winter had previously represented Burin, and would again, but he had been defeated in 1889. He was very involved in the aftermath of Modus Vivendi as a lawyer representing those who had fishing and lobster interests on the French Shore.

90 Winter, Scott, Morine,

91 It is significant that Mr Labouchere’s 1857 Letter where he stated “the rights at present enjoyed by the community of Newfoundland are not to be ceded or exchanged without their assent” is somewhat at odds with the position expressed by Lord Derby (then Colonial Secretary) in 1889 on the 1793 declaration: “his Britannic Majesty will take the most positive measures for preventing his subjects from interrupting in any manner by their competition the fishing of the French”.


Further issues arose over the years. From about 1850 to 1890 the lobster fishery had gradually developed into a major business employing hundreds of people, both English and French, on the West Coast. Collectively it employed almost a thousand local men, girls, and fishermen, and, in the two years 1887-8, produced more than 49,000 cases of lobster which were worth $6.25 each and amounted to over $300,000 worth of finished product. The combined two-year output of the six Bay of Islands canneries alone totalled about 8,800 cases worth $55,000, a substantial sum by Newfoundland standards in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The output of the French factories was fewer than 5,000 cases, less than a tenth that of the Bay of Islands factories. The Bay of Islands cod and herring fisheries had declined due to the greater profitability of lobster, and even more lobster processing plants were planned. Naturally, when an industry burgeons so quickly, there may be problems, and several points of dispute had arisen.

In 1885 a document referred to as the “Arrangement” had been mooted between England and France. Under its terms France would withdraw all claims to exclusive fishery rights and to the right to fish rivers above the tidal limit. She would also agree that any shore fixtures would not be disturbed. In turn England had recognised virtually the existing state of affairs covered in the earlier Treaty, and it had been agreed by both parties that French naval ships would act only when there were infractions of the Treaty, and then only if British ships were not present to do it. At this the Newfoundland Government expressed disappointment, but accepted it reluctantly on two conditions: (1) that they would have the right to erect wharves and buildings in areas where there were minerals, and (2) that one article of the “Arrangement” be rewritten to remove any suggestion of French rights of settlement on the Treaty Shore. This was initialled on 14 November 1885.

1. **Lobster Factories.** Friction developed between the English and French over the lobster fishery in reference to the rights each nation considered itself to possess according to the Treaties. The lobster fishery had tacitly remained an unofficial enterprise for both nations because of the shore installations it required which could be deemed to contravene the Treaties, and each nation objected to recent moves by citizens of the other to develop it further. The French claimed that the Treaties gave them the right to establish shore facilities for processing of lobster similar to the right they traditionally enjoyed for cod salting and drying. The English argued an important difference: the codfish industry required only very basic onshore salting and drying facilities which were easily, cheaply and quickly constructed and just as easily removed; lobster processing was more sophisticated and required an appreciable investment in more complex equipment for boiling, washing, canning and packaging. This meant that lobster processing installations were in comparison much more permanent, a fact that had never been contemplated under the Treaties. For their part, the French complained that their fish

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harvesting was hindered by English fishing.

2) **The Lobster - fish or not?** Another dispute arose over the definition of the lobster: was it classifiable as a “fish”? The French claimed that it was; that they had a right to exploit it just as they had for any other species of fish and that it was included under the Treaties like any other fish. The English reasoned that the lobster was not a “fish” in the strict biological sense. They argued that the Treaties referenced the term “fish” specifically to “codfish”, and that as a consequence the French had no Treaty rights to fish for lobsters. (In Newfoundland today the term “fish” still often refers specifically to “codfish”, although the normal usage is much less specific elsewhere.)

3) **The Bait Bill.** One further irritant had begun to show in the years after about 1850. Newfoundland fishermen inside the limits of the French Shore had developed a trade in bait. 93 This was mutually beneficial to both groups: to the French who had to winter in Europe and were saved valuable time when they arrived which they could then devote to remunerative fishing so much sooner, and to the West Coast fishermen because the trade in bait could reduce their dependence on the local merchants by providing them with a small amount of cash (a rare thing in any outport at this time) to purchase supplies at St Pierre when they transported the bait there to sell it. However this practice was seen by the Newfoundland authorities as damaging to the fishery since it helped the French industry and, when coupled with the heavy subsidy the French government paid to its own fishermen for fish caught in Newfoundland, it gave the French product a distinct price advantage in the same markets that Newfoundland also supplied. In the belief that her Bait Bill would give her power over the French, Newfoundland passed it into law in 1886. This caused further consternation to the French, and on 1887 February 18, Britain unilaterally disallowed the Bait Act for one year. As might be expected, faced with yet another example of British failure to consult with them, Newfoundland reacted with anger, as she had done over similar British decisions in the past.

Until such time as these disputes could be resolved, a temporary agreement, the infamous *Modus Vivendi* was introduced. 94 Under its terms England agreed to impose strict restrictions on the industry as it already existed in Newfoundland and was being prosecuted throughout the French Shore. Among other conditions, existing installations would be permitted to continue operations, but no new facilities would be allowed. Any disputes

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93 At this time the industry was mostly a *hook and line* fishery which used a long line from which hooks were suspended. This required large quantities of bait to be caught, a task which stole time from remunerative fishing. The herring and lobster industries both began as bait fisheries and gradually evolved into profitable cash export markets once a practical canning process was available to permit shipping a quality product from Newfoundland to the growing cities of the north-eastern USA. The process of canning was invented about 1810 and within half a century was revolutionising many food industries. It was very important before deep-freezing technology had become widespread as it could be used anywhere with relatively simple equipment and did not necessarily require a supply of electricity.

94 *Modus Vivendi* - a Latin expression meaning literally “a way of living”, an instrument for establishing an international accord of temporary or provisional nature, intended to be replaced in due time by a more substantial and thorough agreement, such as a treaty.
arising from this condition were to be decided by a joint decision of a senior official (usually a naval officer) from each nation.

At a superficial glance it would seem that the *Modus Vivendi* ought to provide a workable temporary solution to the dispute, and perhaps it would have, but once more the cavalier manner of its introduction doomed it from the start. It had appeared without warning when the Governor of Newfoundland introduced it as a *fait accompli* in his Speech from the Throne at the opening of the Legislature session on 1890 March 07. The Legislature members immediately quoted the Despatch of 1857 (the Labouchere Letter) and complained that they had been given no part in either the formulation of the *Modus Vivendi* or in its implementation. The Legislature held that the cherished right they believed was theirs had once more been ignored. They reacted promptly on 1890 March 16, with the following resolution:

*BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED—That the commencement, continuation, and conclusion of the negotiations for the modus vivendi without the knowledge and consent of the community or Legislature were in direct violation of our constitutional rights, and of the particular engagement with the people of Newfoundland which Her Majesty’s Government voluntarily made; against which violation we record our most earnest protest; and to which we as a free people will never consent.*

The *Modus Vivendi* inflamed feelings all over the Island, particularly on the West Coast. Protest meetings were held, and angry messages were received in St John’s objecting to what the British Government had done. This announcement from the Bay of Islands of a public meeting, and the message which resulted from that meeting, were typical:

*Bay of Islands, March 21, 1890.*

A general meeting of inhabitants has been called for Monday, to indignantly protest against the action of British and French Governments re lobster factories. Five factories have been established, and five new ones are building. Numbers of men and women have been shipped, material prepared, and considerable expense gone to generally. Orders have been accepted for spring supplies. We will use every effort in defence of our rights as British subjects.

After the meeting which was chaired by Rev F W Colley, priest of the Bay of Islands Anglican Mission from 1888 to 1891, another message was sent:

*Bay of Islands, March 24, 1890.*

Enthusiastic meeting held today, petition to House signed by everyone present. Two resolutions passed. First I send:

WHEREAS we have heard of recent arrangement made between the British and French Governments without the consent of the colony relative to the lobster fishery and the establishment of French lobster factories on this coast:

**IT IS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that this meeting most indignantly protests against the unprecedented invasion of our rights as British subjects on this coast.**

Rev F W Colley, Chairman Public Meeting

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95 The four messages containing resolutions are all quoted from Winter, Scott, Morine, *French Treaty Rights in Newfoundland: The Case for the Colony stated by the People’s Delegates*, on pages 7, 124 and 122 (2 messages).
The message below from Little Bay is included because it is more specific in its demands than was the Bay of Islands message. A considerable number of similar messages also arrived at the capital.

Little Bay, March 24, 1890.

BE IT RESOLVED That this meeting unanimously protest against the invasion of their colonial rights, and that the colony should have a voice in any agreement made.

BE IT RESOLVED That this meeting is unanimously of opinion that the above-mentioned treaties should be terminated, and that the whole territorial and maritime rights of the whole coasts of Newfoundland should belong solely to the people of Newfoundland. 17

At the same time the Marquis de Beaumanoir expressed the dissenting French opinion quite succinctly:

We are at home on the French shore and can make our own police regulations. The British have no right to know whether we fish lobsters or not. They have no right to come here. I regret that after so many concessions England asks us for yet another. 96

The Times of London, 30 May 1891

There could be no doubt about the indignation, even the anger, expressed in all of these messages. But of course the Treaties were more concerned with the situation in Europe than with Newfoundland, which was insignificant in comparison, so nothing was done to satisfy the Colony. At the conclusion of their report Winter, Scott and Morine wrote:

It is the clear and settled conviction of the whole people of the colony—the result of a long and bitter experience, and of a full knowledge of the whole subject—that upon no other basis than that of an entire extinguishment (of course upon some honourable and satisfactory terms) of French rights and claims in the colony of Newfoundland, can there be any solution of the difficulties which have now become so grave and acute; and, further, we have been specially instructed by the unanimous resolutions of public meetings held throughout the colony to say that to no “settlement” of the “French shore” question which does not contain this as an essential basis will the colonists agree. 97

Despite the unequivocal findings of Winter, Scott and Morine published in 1890, the issue was not yet resolved. In the ensuing years more complaints were made by Newfoundland fishermen about their treatment by the British authorities. Conflicts such as these arose frequently between the Legislature of the Colony, which wanted to consolidate its authority in all parts of the Island (including the West Coast), and the Colonial Office in London, which had concerns extending far beyond Newfoundland’s affairs. The appointment of magistrates to the West Coast was one such issue that demonstrated Britain’s ambivalent position. The navy was historically entrusted with the enforcement of civil laws among civilians in Newfoundland. Although the ships’ officers had consistently demonstrated their ability to do this, and to do it well, the terms of the Treaty made this endeavour invalid almost by definition, rendering it tantamount to a prohibition on settlement. But by this time there was on the West Coast a population sufficient to require a civil law establishment. In 1877

96 The Times of London, 30 May 1891.

permission had been given by the Colonial Secretary for the appointment of a magistrate at St George’s, but it had included a British stipulation that there was to be no adjudication by the magistrate on Treaty matters. The Newfoundland Government then promptly followed with the appointment of customs officers and plans to enfranchise the West Coast. Britain allowed the customs appointments, but enfranchisement was refused.

3. The End of the French Shore

By the turn of the century even the French had begun to doubt the practicality of their interests in Newfoundland. However they were not prepared to give up without something of a fight, and as late as 1900 they were still making the lives of fishermen in Lark Harbour (and other settlements on the French Shore) uncomfortable, to say the least, although the settlers were handling it well enough that they could afford also to quarrel among themselves, a sure sign that the old constraints were severely weakened! The following letter to the Editor of The Western Star, Corner Brook, from Robert Joyce (c1830 - 1918), an elderly resident of Lark Harbour at the time of his letter, illustrates the still prevailing attitudes of both French and British towards the settlers even at this comparatively late time in the history of the French Shore.

Dear Sir: Allow me a little space in your valuable paper to let the public know what a nice job our warships have on this coast. Now, I have had four visits from the war ships, two visits from the French and two from the English, and also the following letter threatening and accusing me of packing lobsters:

Her Majesty’s Ship ‘Buzzard’, at Lark Harbour, 2 July 1900.

From Commander Leicester Francis Gartside Tippinge, H.M.S. Buzzard, to Robert Joyce.

I have been informed that you are illegally canning lobsters at Lark Harbour. Should you continue this infraction of the Modus Vivendi you will lay yourself open to the penalties set forth by the laws of this colony.

L. G. Tippinge, Commander, R.N.

Now, sir, I am an old man and am going on to seventy years of age, and I can positively swear that I never caught or packed a lobster in my life and it is not likely that I ever will. Although being an old man I have managed to pay one hundred cents to the dollar, and perhaps can count dollars with this Mr Hecla, 98 who is fooling the war ships. Now, Mr Hecla has a lot of lobster ground and besides this he tries to hold more than he can manage. He claims to own Lark Harbour and that the people here must not put out a trap to catch a lobster to eat, although he has not fished the place for three years past. Now, Mr Editor, if this has no effect and I am bothered in the future, I intend to take action for damages.

Yours truly,
Robert Joyce, Lark Harbour, July 28, 1900.

Robert Joyce was not alone in his dispute with the French. A short while after Mr Joyce’s letter appeared in

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98 Mr “Hecla” would seem to be Mr Hacala, owner of the St-Pierre-et-Miquelon/French fishing company H Hacala which operated a lobster fishery in the Bay of Islands around the end of the nineteenth century.
the *Western Star*, a certain Captain Joseph Petipas was contracted by a Canadian company to set up a factory to smoke herring in Middle Arm, one of the three fiords which reach some further ten kilometres or so inland from the Bay of Islands. According to a report in the *Western Star* of 1900 August 17, on his arrival at the site Petipas was confronted by the same Mr Hacala mentioned in Mr Joyce’s letter and was told “that he would not be allowed to put up a building in Middle Arm. Capt Petipas endeavoured to reason with the lobster packer, but all he got for his pains was a threat that if the buildings were put up they would be torn down. Rather than cause any unpleasantness Capt Petipas transferred his materials to North Arm where he now [in 1900] has his buildings well under way.”  

Mr Joyce’s letter clearly demonstrates two things: (1) that there was still in effect a policy whereby the interests of the French were deemed by the British Government to be at least as important as those of the Newfoundland fishermen; and (2) that many local people were making a good living for themselves despite the burdensome Treaty regulations. The disagreement between Mr Joyce and Mr Hecla, and the fact that the latter was apparently able to secure the assistance of the Commander of HMS *Buzzard* in his dealings with Mr Joyce, coupled with Mr Joyce’s inability to do the same for himself, is proof that the *Modus Vivendi* was being actively supported by the British authorities to the disadvantage of the settlers. However, to give credit where it was due, various suggestions had been made by the Imperial Government to resolve the anomaly, but France had consistently refused to accept any of them.

4. Whales to the Rescue

When the resolution of the French Shore problem came, it came quickly. Whaling was becoming an increasingly important industry and stations were being set up wherever the animals could be caught. However many of the same considerations applied to whaling as had applied to the lobster enterprises: whaling was deemed not to be included under the terms of the Treaty because whales are not fish, and the efficient prosecution of the industry required extensive land bases.

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99 Middle Arm and North Arm are two of the three fiords at the eastern end of the Bay, and until about 1950 there were small fishing settlements on the shores of both. North Arm is now uninhabited, but the modern town of Cox’s Cove is located in Middle Arm.

100 Anticosti had been annexed to Newfoundland from 1763 to 1774 and again from 1809 to 1825, when it became part of Lower Canada. At that time the waters surrounding it had been open to all. But in 1895 a wealthy French chocolate maker, Henri Menier, had bought the island for $125,000 and leased the shore fishing rights for himself. He also built the small town of Port-Menier and a cannery for fish and lobster, and turned the island into a game reserve where he raised animals for his own personal hunting. The island in effect became his own personal fiefdom. After reporting what had happened to Captain Petipas, the *Western Star* of 1900 July 28 editorialises with a few pungent and critical comments: “Sugar Stick” Menier drove all the Newfoundlanders and Canadians off Anticosti; Hacala wants to drive them off the coast of Newfoundland. It is surprising how submissive our people are under such aggravating circumstances, but then we must remember they are kept so by French and British ships of war. In this enlightened age, however, when even Newfoundlanders are no longer a colony of “miserable ignorant fishermen”, the people will not suffer long for the sins of those who made those absurd treaties, which have not alone cause privation and suffering to Newfoundlanders but have also brought disgrace to the British flag.”

101 A whale processing station was set up at Lark Harbour on the western shore of the harbour towards the present Provincial Park. Only one whale carcass was ever processed there, but some relics of the plant can still be seen on the shore.
Thus it was that the whaling industry brought the entire French Shore question to the point where a resolution had to be sought. Applications made by Newfoundlanders to the British authorities for whaling licences had consistently been rejected on the grounds that a whale fishery would interfere with established French rights. But similar applications made by Newfoundlanders directly to the French naval authorities brought about no objection. Newfoundland’s Prime Minister Sir Robert Bond (PM 1901-1909), viewing this as yet one more anachronistic element and a further threat to his country’s sovereignty, urged the British Government to take

such immediate action as will convince the people of this Colony that it is altogether unnecessary for them to seek for permission of a foreign power to carry on their business in any quarter. 102

The French Shore issue had now become an embarrassment to everybody, yet it still persisted. It seemed, however, as if it had finally run its course, and common sense was about to prevail. On 1904 April 08 a new agreement between Britain and France, the Entente cordiale, was signed. The Entente covered a number of topics, part of it being a Convention between Great Britain and France, respecting Newfoundland, and West and Central Africa. Its most important provision for Newfoundland was clear and simple:

Article I - France renounces the privileges established to her advantage by Article XIII of the Treaty of Utrecht, and confirmed or modified by subsequent provisions.

The subsequent articles also contained provisions of importance to Newfoundland, but were longer and more convoluted and might be summarised as follows: Article II defined provisions allowing France continued access for fishing in specified time periods, locations and conditions, and with some regulation by local authorities under whom ‘British subjects and French citizens shall be subject alike to the laws and Regulations now in force, or which may hereafter be passed’; and Article III defined ‘pecuniary indemnity’ provisions for French citizens who were directly affected. The remaining Articles IV, V, VI and VII defined the changes made to certain territorial boundaries reflecting the ceding of territories from Britain to France in West and Central Africa. 103 The key to this agreement was the term in Article II that effectively required the French to submit to the laws of Newfoundland.

The French may therefore fish there for every kind of fish, including bait and also shell fish. They may enter any port or harbour on the said coast and may there obtain supplies or bait and shelter on the same conditions as the inhabitants of Newfoundland, but they will remain subject to the local Regulations in force. 104

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102 Letter from Sir Robert Bond, Premier of Newfoundland, to Sir Cavendish Boyle, Governor of the Colony, dated 1 September 1903, incl. in no. 154 in N.A, no. 194, quoted by Chadwick, Newfoundland: Island into Province, p106.

103 View the full text at http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/inclosure2.html a website of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

104 Article II of the Entente - Convention between Great Britain and France, respecting Newfoundland, and West and Central Africa.
The French were now satisfied because the agreement upheld their traditional right to fish in Newfoundland waters for all species of marine life, while the Newfoundlanders were contented because the French were held to the same conditions as they themselves were. No longer would the settlers be subjected to the indignities of being told by foreigners what they could do on their own shores.

Still it was not quite all plain sailing for Newfoundland. In a speech to the House of Assembly on 1904 April 21, Prime Minister Sir Robert Bond congratulated the Imperial Government in highly patriotic terms for bringing the issue to a satisfactory conclusion from the viewpoint of Newfoundland. The speech contained some sentiments which were inflammatory to the French, almost derailing the entire agreement, and there is indeed a gloating tone in his words. Eventually, however, the French came round to the view that really nothing much had changed and there was even some benefit to them: their right to fish was reaffirmed, and a new right for them to purchase bait was enshrined in the agreement. Among some West Coast Newfoundlanders who made a living out of the French presence there may have been regret, but they were a minority, and any regret was soon submerged in the general euphoria surrounding the agreement.

There can be no question that this change entailed advantages for all parts of the Island. But it was of extreme importance for residents of the French Shore as it meant the removal of the final obstacle to natural growth and development of a meaningful economy. There was much catching up to do which would take time, but now it could happen. Britain’s Oldest Colony had finally shaken off the burdensome shackles of her colonial history and was set to take her rightful independent place in the twentieth century. As Sir Robert Bond said in his speech to the Newfoundland Legislature on 1904 April 21, “even the memory of their [the French] presence will fade like a fevered dream before the brightness of a new day”.

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105 “The French Shore Question has been settled after years and years of vain endeavour... No other Convention ever contemplated the abandonment by the French of their establishments on the Treaty Shore. This does more, it heralds the near approach of the time when even the memory of their presence will fade like a fevered dream before the brightness of a new day.” From the speech of Sir Robert Bond before the Newfoundland House of Assembly, 1904 April 21, shortly after the signing in London on 1904 April 08, of the Convention between Britain and France, respecting Newfoundland and West and Central Africa, reported in the Evening Telegram, St John’s, on 1904 April 22, and quoted by Chadwick, in Newfoundland: Island into Province, pp 108-9.
TREATIES OF UTRECHT, PARIS & VERSAILLES
as they affected Newfoundland

TREATY OF UTRECHT, 1713
Gave to France the right to fish and use the land for procurement of wood and for setting up of flaks up to three miles inland

1- from CAPE BONAVISTA on the East Coast
2- to POINT RICHE on the West Coast.

TREATY OF PARIS, 1763
Gave to France the same rights to fish and use the land for procurement of wood and for setting up of flaks up to three miles inland

1- from CAPE BONAVISTA on the East Coast
2- to POINT RICHE on the West Coast, and
3- unconditional ownership of the Islands of St Pierre and Miquelon off Newfoundland’s South Coast.

TREATY OF VERSAILLES, 1783
Gave to France the right to fish and use the land for procurement of wood and for setting up of flaks up to three miles inland

1- from CAPE ST JOHN, E of White Bay
2- to CAPE RAY on the SW Coast, and
3- unconditional ownership of the Islands of St Pierre and Miquelon off Newfoundland’s South Coast.
1. The Great American and European Short Line Railway

In the latter half of the nineteenth century railways had become objects of extreme interest in both Europe and North America. They had revolutionised travel on both continents, reducing previously intimidating overland odysseys to journeys of no more than a few days, and beginning the world-shrinking process that today we take for granted. Steam transportation had no less effect on the people of the nineteenth century than air travel by jet has on us of a hundred years later. And Sandford Fleming, who would later become Canada’s supreme railway engineer, was one of those most inspired by it. When he was sponsored by the governments of Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Québec) to conduct surveys to investigate the practicability of laying out a railway to link them with the Maritimes, he presented to them a detailed report describing fifteen different routes, but recommending one which terminated at Shippigan, close to the northeastern extremity of New Brunswick.

By 1865 railways in Britain were routinely carrying passengers and mail at an average of about 40 miles per hour, an unprecedented speed in the history of transportation. In North America the speed was somewhat slower, but rail was still by far the fastest and by then the most efficient mode of overland travel. At sea, properly designed steamships were able to travel at speeds of about sixteen miles per hour, a vast
improvement over sail-powered ships, but still slow when compared with land travel. Fleming recognised the
importance of speed for the increasing commercial activity between Europe and North America. His survey,
not restricted to engineering matters alone, had discovered that

In 1864 no less than ten regular lines of ocean steamers were employed in running either to
New York or to ports north of that City in the United States or Canada. Of these ten lines,
two were weekly, and eight fortnightly, equivalent in all to six weekly lines, so that there were
on an average six steamships, leaving each side weekly or nearly one every day ... The total
number of passengers carried by these various Steam lines during the past year was 135,317

Fleming had realised that by replacing sea with land travel, specifically rail whenever possible, times between
Europe and North America could be drastically reduced. Thus, when he submitted his report to his sponsors,
he added a fascinating appendix in which he suggested a continuous land and sea route connecting Europe with
North America by way of Ireland and Newfoundland:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Time</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From London to Valentia, southwest Ireland</td>
<td>at present rate of speed in England</td>
<td>16.0 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Valentia to St John’s, NL</td>
<td>1,640 miles at 16.5 miles an hour</td>
<td>100.0 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From St John’s to St George’s, NL</td>
<td>250 miles at 30.0 miles an hour</td>
<td>8.5 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From St George’s to Shippigan, NB</td>
<td>250 miles at 16.5 miles an hour</td>
<td>15.5 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Shippigan to New York, USA</td>
<td>906 miles at 30.0 miles an hour</td>
<td>31.0 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>171.0 hours</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is thus apparent that, without assuming a rate of speed at all extraordinary, it would be possible to
carry Mails from London to New York in 171 hours by the route passing over Ireland, Newfoundland
and by the proposed Intercolonial Railway from Shippigan. ¹⁰⁷

Such a project, while revolutionary by any standards, would have brought untold benefits to Newfoundland,
bringing the Island into the mainstream of North American life a full century earlier. The route was to cross
the Island fairly directly, passing down Southwest Brook to come out on the West Coast at Bay St George.
It would have missed the Bay of Islands entirely, but there would be concomitant benefits to the area just the
same. As part of the deal to finance the railway, a project unquestionably beyond the means of Newfoundland
on her own, Sir John A Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada at the time and always keen on the concept of
a transcontinental railway, offered to finance the construction of the railway across Newfoundland if the
Island would agree to Confederation with the other British North American colonies.

The Conservative Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Hugh Hoyles (PM 1861-1865), had earlier
discussed with Canada’s Sir Charles Tupper the possibility of Confederation with Canada and had been
invited to the Charlottetown Conference of 1864 where Confederation was to be the main agenda. However,

¹⁰⁷ Clayton, p94.
believing that there was little public support in Newfoundland for Confederation, Hoyles declined the invitation, sending Frederick Carter, a Protestant and a Conservative, and Ambrose Shea, a Liberal and a Roman Catholic, to Charlottetown in his stead. Both were favourably impressed and became strong supporters of Sir John A Macdonald’s brand of federalism, and on their return they presented a report in that spirit. Hoyles, however, still exercising caution, firstly did not want to precipitate opposition from the general population who, he felt, might not have a good understanding of the concept; and secondly, he did not want to arouse the opposition of the merchants who were dedicated to their traditional trade with Europe and were sceptical that there would be any benefits to them from contact with Canada. Additionally, the Irish-dominated Roman Catholic hierarchy in St John’s was very satisfied with the status quo which they had worked hard to achieve and would not easily be persuaded to relinquish, by accepting union with the much more ‘British’ colonies on the mainland.

In 1865 Hoyles resigned as Prime Minister. Frederick Carter assumed leadership and won an election the same year, forming a coalition which included Ambrose Shea who favoured Confederation, but the topic was not raised as an election issue. Another election was held in 1869, in which Carter’s government, along with Ambrose Shea, lost to the anti-Confederation party of Charles Fox Bennett (PM 1870-1874), by 9 seats to 21. Newfoundland’s business and commercial interests with New England and Britain were judged to be more important than any possible connection with the sister colonies of British North America. This attitude was rather specifically of East Coast origin, since West Coast residents had enjoyed quite long and substantial trading contacts with Nova Scotia and would have welcomed closer ties with that region. The new Prime Minister, Bennett, himself strongly opposed to any idea of Confederation with Canada, used his victory to bolster his views. Thus in 1869 Fleming’s Great American and European Short Line Railway project suffered a setback which led to its ultimate rejection.  

Another obstacle came in the form of the refusal of the British government to entertain any venture such as Fleming’s project, which would have resulted in significant permanent construction on the West Coast, and might possibly be deemed to increase friction with the French over Newfoundland. Once more the infamous Treaties of Utrecht, Paris, and Versailles barred the way of progress for the Island, and particularly the West Coast, which would have been a major greatest beneficiary of Fleming’s plan. But this was not yet quite the end of the project, for in 1882 an act was passed in the Newfoundland Legislature incorporating “The Great American and European Short Line Railway Company”, whose objective was “the

\[108\] For more detail on the politics of the time, in both Canada and Newfoundland, consult G A Rawlyk: *The Atlantic Provinces and the Problems of Confederation*, pp51-56.
establishment of more safe and speedy communication between America and Europe by way of Newfoundland”. Sadly, however, the only tangible achievement of this venture was a short section of line between Oxford Junction and New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. When the company could not pay its contractors, the work so far completed was sold and became part of another railway line. In all fairness to those who would have been involved, the project would have been a very ambitious one, a “megaproject” in its day, and for that reason alone, even if was begun, it may never have come to full fruition.

2. The Newfoundland Railway

Newfoundlanders, however, while not prepared to confederate, were now inspired with the idea of having their own railway. Their appetites had been whetted for the good things they saw being enjoyed by everyone else in North America. Consequently, after the Colony passed through several prosperous years in the fishery, another survey was initiated. This time a different route was plotted, to pass down the southern side of Deer Lake, to emerge from the wilderness at the Bay of Islands and to proceed via Bay St George westwards to Port aux Basques, the most reliably ice-free port on the western side of the Island. This route was essentially the one finally followed by the Newfoundland Railway, and was not very different from that selected for the modern TransCanada Highway. Given the imperialistic attitude of London and the conservatism of Newfoundland’s own capital, one has to wonder whether any railway across the Island would ever have been constructed had not Fleming made his earlier suggestion which stimulated interest in such a project.

Actual construction of the rail line started on 1881 August 09 under the charter of incorporation of the Newfoundland Railway Company. The terrain of the Island, rocky, boggy, full of lakes and rivers, and often precipitous, combined with the scattered nature of its settlements, made such a project very expensive. The Colony’s lack of a substantial capital base meant that financing must come from outside, thus placing Newfoundland’s needs at the mercy of those who controlled the capital markets. Speculators, politicians, would-be entrepreneurs, and shysters, of course, all wanted their share. The French continued their opposition to any construction on the Treaty Shore. In the end, seeing the railway fraught with financial difficulties, the Government had to agree to large land grants to offset construction costs, on a pattern similar to those used in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Canada. In Newfoundland this resulted in the Reid Company gaining ownership of enormous quantities of land beside the roadbed: prime land for development. However the railway construction went ahead, despite financial difficulties and French opposition, but with a decision to use a narrow gauge roadbed in the interest of lower cost of construction. So Newfoundland finally had her railway across the Island, although the seeds of its obsolescence were sown in the narrow

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109 Clayton, p102.
gauge that actually caused greater expense in the long run than it saved, making eventual closure more likely. But even so the railway played a huge and useful part in forwarding development of the Island’s West Coast by linking it more immediately to the capital.

Robert Gillespie Reid (1842-1908), a millionaire Scottish engineer who lived in Montreal and who had extensive experience in constructing projects including railways, bridges, and mines all over the world, was just the man to complete the job. For his trouble he was to receive $15,000 for each mile of line built, and as payment for operating the railway for fifty years, he was granted a final total of 2½ million acres of land running on each side of the track for its full length. Reid thus secured much of the most valuable land the railway traversed, but it is doubtful if it would ever have been built without those concessions. After numerous vicissitudes, the railway was finally completed across the Island in 1897, at a cost of $11,644,692, and Reid had accumulated almost twice as much in land grants as had originally been offered. But the railway, although with narrow gauge, sharp turns and steep grades which would always generate problems, was completed.

The following description captures some of the excitement that must have been felt on that first transinsular trip ending at Port aux Basques, where the beautiful custom-built steamer the SS Bruce stood ready for the next leg of the journey:

She’d be waiting at Port aux Basques when, for the first time in the history of Newfoundland, a train struggled across the country and chuffchuffed down to the shores of Cabot Strait. The first regular express train left St John’s at 7:20 pm, Wednesday, June 29, 1898, on its 548 mile journey to Port aux Basques. Locomotives No. 5 and No. 2 double headed the train over the final leg of the trip and, 27 hours and 15 minutes after leaving St John’s, at 10:45 on the night of June 30, the new pier at Port aux Basques began to shake with the vibrations of the train’s coming. The Bruce had been waiting at the pier, to start the service for which she’d been built, since before dark. And now a whistle sounded somewhere north of the town. The train’s bells began their clanging declaration of an historic moment and, in a happy confusion of steam, hissing air, and screaming wheels, the transinsular express pulled onto the wharf.

In their heyday, before modern road networks existed, railways were able to make or break a town, depending on whether the route took them through it or not; towns that welcomed them had a means to attract new business, while those that refused or were not on the planned routes found themselves cast on the scrapheap of historical bygones. The West Coast port of Sandy Point on what was a slender peninsula in Bay St George

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110 Chadwick, p85.
was a perfect case in point, though through no fault of its own. The major port for a hundred years on the West Coast, Sandy Point was located on a low narrow spit of sand jutting out into St George’s Bay, an ideal spot for shipping; but it went into decline while nearby, across a quarter mile of water, the town of St George’s began to grow. Close though Sandy Point was to St George’s, the distance may as well have been a hundred miles, for businesses wanted to be near the railway and to avoid the inconvenience of a boat trip, and the people wanted to be near the businesses. When a major storm in the middle years of the last century broke through the low isthmus and converted the peninsula to an island, the decline of Sandy Point became complete. Today it is totally deserted.

The Outer Bay of Islands, with its difficult terrain that made the building of even a cart road a major project, saw nothing of the trains. The line crossed the sparsely-populated central region, then followed the southern side of Deer Lake, through the narrow gorge of the Humber River just east of Corner Brook, and along the shore and past the Paper Mill. Next it climbed quite steeply, eventually passing through Birchy Cove and leaving the Humber Arm at Mount Moriah on the way to Bay St George and Port aux Basques. (Most of the rail bed, with the rails removed, is still there, part of the T’Railway across the Island.) However the railway did its part in helping to bring the neglected West Coast, including the Outer Bay of Islands, into the twentieth century. It also provided most of the benefits of improved transportation for the isolated
communities like those of the Outer Bay, even though they were many miles distant from the rail line itself and had to travel almost fifty kilometres by boat to gain access to it. But for the West Coast in general, more than for the rest of the Island, the completion and start-up of the Railway was one more huge step towards control of its own destiny because it provided easier access than ever before to other populated parts of the Island. Despite the long journey, frequent derailments, and delays caused by heavy snowfalls, track washouts, and the wind hazards at Wreck House, the Railway served faithfully until the completion in the 1960s of the Newfoundland section of the TransCanada Highway.

As a final note to the story of the Newfoundland Railway, it became part of the Canadian National Railway system after 1949, and then fell victim to the closings of rail lines which occurred all over the western world in the last half of the twentieth century. The justification for this in the case of the Newfoundland line was that the narrow gauge was too much of a liability, more prone to derailments and causing extra expense from the need to transfer from standard North American gauge at Port aux Basques where standard axles were exchanged for narrow gauge on all rolling stock. And above all the cost of track upgrading to the standard North American gauge would be prohibitive. Under the articles of Confederation, Canada was responsible to keep the railway in operation. However, a deal was struck between the Government of Newfoundland and that of Canada, and the Province received compensation to enable it to improve the TransCanada Highway across the Island to accommodate the increase of road traffic that would occur. Sadly, in less than a hundred years, the railway was closed down and the tracks removed. Happily, though, most of the right-of-way has been preserved and is now the T’Railway, a hiking, biking, and horse-riding trail across most of the Island.

3. The Corner Brook Lumber Industry

In 1865 a Halifax firm, Silver and Company, established a sawmill near the mouth of a small brook flowing into a corner of the Humber Arm. The town which grew around the brook came to be known as Corner Brook. This enterprise brought an influx of loggers from all over Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to swell the growing population of the Bay. A plentiful supply of large pine trees which could be cut into spars and planks suitable for ships stimulated a schooner-building industry in the Bay, and timber was also exported to the USA, Canada, and Europe. This quickly became an extremely successful operation, employing seasonally up to a hundred men and producing up to five million board feet and a thousand tons of lumber annually. The logging industry provided much-needed employment during the slack winter months when the fishery was inoperable, and added a new dimension to the working lives of Bay of Islands men. Until quite recently many men regularly pursued the practice of fishing in summer and logging in winter.  

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113 Mannion, p239.
In 1872 Christopher Martin Fisher (1840-1927) moved from Nova Scotia to Corner Brook with his family to work on contract with the Silver lumber mill, and in the following year he bought the mill. He continued to operate it very successfully, and the little town grew, eventually surpassing all the other communities in the Bay. In 1923 Fisher sold his mill to the Newfoundland Pulp and Paper Company who used the site for their giant newsprint plant which began construction that same year. Christopher Fisher was a key influence on the modern economy of the entire Bay of Islands, and he is credited with being the actual founder of the City of Corner Brook.

Another smaller mill was established independently at Summerside on the north side of the Bay. This flourished until the final years of the nineteenth century when Birchy Cove with its railway service became the main settlement in the area. At that time the small mill closed, and Summerside was gradually eclipsed by the more fortunate communities, Birchy Cove and Corner Brook, which had the advantage of being beside the railway track.

All of these commercial enterprises, as well as the spin-off businesses which developed because of them, attracted single men or young family people from the Outer Bay in search of jobs in Corner Brook.
4. The York Harbour Copper Mine

Other things were also starting to happen. About 1892 a prospector named Daniel Henderson located a copper deposit about a mile east of York Harbour, some thousand feet up the precipitous north side of Blow-Me-Down Mountain near a stream known today as Copper Mine Brook. Unable to finance a mine himself, Henderson offered his find to others who might, and a St John’s merchant, A J Harvey, bought part ownership of the property. Hedley V Smythe was appointed mine manager, and Charles Rendell was mine captain.

Under Rendell’s instructions, mining began in a disorganised manner in 1897 with the sinking of four shafts and the construction of “a precarious chute and pulley contraption to transport pork barrels of ore down the cliff to the coast”. By 1899 some 500 tons of ore had been extracted but it remained unsold on the shore below the mine. In 1900 A J Harvey fired Rendell and leased the mine to the York Harbour Copper Company of Manchester, England. A new mine captain, James Hooper, was appointed.

Hooper effected some improvements, deepening the shafts and installing a motor to raise the ore from the shafts. But according to manager Hedley Smythe, the mine workings were being driven in the wrong direction, away from the ore body rather than staying with it, and mistakenly “the conclusion was arrived at that the bottom of the ore was reached and that it had cut out completely”. Smythe’s practical experience at this mine led him to disagree with this assessment. It would seem that there was a conflict here between one judgement based on general theory and another based on actual knowledge, and with two senior officials in disagreement, problems were naturally to be expected.

Hedley Smythe then decided to go public, and he wrote a letter to The Western Star explaining the problem as he saw it. His letter appeared in the Corner Brook newspaper’s issue of 1901 Nov 22:

... the ore near the surface and for some distance below it, is what is known as being “not in place” but thrown out of its regular course by the various upheavals and convulsions of the country in past ages. We have this disturbance here to a greater extent than in a low country; one main shaft being at an altitude of 1000 feet from level of sea. Now it is obvious that one has to be guided in this search for ore not by any given rule but by knowledge only acquired by familiarity with like deposits in this country. Experience gained in copper deposits in other countries is not to be depended on, as in most cases they are in a totally different formation and require different working. In this case our local methods of mining were not adhered to, the natural result being that although a large body of ore was opened up the workings were in depth gradually going from instead of to the regular or main lode. Consequently the conclusion arrived at was that the bottom of ore was reached and that it had cut out completely. Having been connected with this property since its first working and knowing the peculiarities of the formation here, I had every confidence that such was not so. On recommencing work on the first of November all energy was concentrated on proving “likely” looking ground 190 feet below surface and west of main shaft. Ore was struck in the first shift and at present we have opened up a deposit of solid ore which is now 8 (eight) feet
in width and which I feel confident is a portion of the main lode sought. The quality of this ore is undoubted; it is the richest mined here and as far as I am aware second to none in the country. From the large body of ore gone through from the surface, about 5000 tons in sight, and with the recent addition of our present new band, I think that the future of the York Harbour mine would make the most confirmed pessimist dry up. 114

Incompetence and reluctance to heed the voice of local knowledge, were not the mine’s only problems:

Sparks from the cookhouse started a fire at the mine in June [1900] and forced everyone to flee with their possessions down to the beach. A brief visit from the French navy squelched plans to build a new pier and tramway; and a summer dysentery epidemic struck the settlement, rendering many of the miners helpless for days. 115

As the railwaymen had run into problems when they had needed permission from the authorities to build on the French Shore, so “The proprietors of the picturesquely named Blow Me Down Mine were in similar trouble. Every mining licence requiring the Governor’s approval contained a caveat as to the insecurity in law of leases or grants in the Treaty Zone”. 116 An 1890 Memorandum to Cabinet maintained:

that no permanent buildings of any kind may be erected, no mines opened, no magistrates appointed, in short that the whole coast for several hundred miles is to be closed to the colonists, and consequently the resources of the country behind left undeveloped, in order that no French fisherman shall be prevented from hauling his net or drying his fish in any spot which takes his fancy. 117

In 1902, A J Harvey refused to renew the lease of the York Harbour Copper Company and instead leased it to the Humber Consolidated Mining and Manufacturing Company and Daniel Henderson, the original discoverer. Several improvements were made, and between 1902 and 1905 some 15,000 tons of ore were shipped to the USA. More troubles, this time financial, resulted in court cases and bankruptcy. Chronic shortage and heavy turnover of workers also created problems, in spite of efforts to provide better conditions. One such improvement in conditions was the establishment of a boarding house for the miners, operated by William Murrin and his wife Priscilla. William and his brothers Moses and Herbert, had earlier worked their way across the Island following the railway construction, and had arrived eventually at York Harbour to work at the mine. Another incentive of interest to those with families was provided by James P Druggett Sr, a self educated man and also a miner, in the form of Sunday school classes for the children of miners who had their homes nearby. However it appears that these measures failed to solve the labour problems, although in the

114 The Western Star, Corner Brook, NL, 1901 Nov 22.
116 Chadwick, p106.
117 Quoted in Chadwick, p49, from a memo to Cabinet, March 1890.
long run they contributed to the growth and development of the two towns, York Harbour and Lark Harbour. But the mine again seemed doomed to failure.

At this time a group of London mining engineers and merchants formed a new company, the York Harbour Mine (Newfoundland) Limited. Approaches were made to the Newfoundland Government to install a copper smelter at York Harbour. This was approved by the Government, and two Copper Smelting Acts were passed in 1910 and 1911 to subsidise the cost of construction of smelters up to $50,000 per mine owner. However no smelter was ever built in York Harbour. A few years later, after an accident in which one miner, John Sheppard, was killed when a working collapsed, the mine was closed in September 1913 and the company was wound up. At its peak the York Harbour Copper Mine employed three hundred men, but only for a very brief time. It appears never to have been successful for very long, and no more than a few cargoes of ore were shipped out during its entire sporadic lifetime of almost twenty years.
Nothing further occurred until 1955 when the mine was reactivated briefly to maintain the mineral rights, and to this day whatever ore exists there remains untouched. Ruins of the mine workings and some of the machinery are still visible at the recently developed parking area of the Copper Mine-Cape Walking Trails.  

Other minerals in the Bay of Islands area are marble and limestone along the Humber River near Corner Brook, slate at Summerside and Curling; and copper at Goose Arm. A mine to work that copper deposit, belonging to R G Reid, existed only a few months.  

The limestone beside the Humber has only been exploited quite recently, since 1951, by the North Star Cement Company. The marble deposit was worked in the 1950s for the building of Corner Brook Western Memorial Hospital.  

5. The Slate Quarries

Although the slate quarries of Summerside and Curling are not strictly in our area of concern, which is specifically the Outer Bay of Islands, they are close enough to be of interest. The two quarries operating around the turn of the century fared no better than the York Harbour Copper Mine, but they left behind a history that is much more entertaining. The Bay of Islands had two sites that yielded good quality slate, one on the north shore of the Humber Arm, at Summerside, the other at Birchy Cove on the south shore, both major communities in the years before Corner Brook began to develop.

The saga of the Summerside quarry began in 1900 when the Welsh slate industry, a major supplier to British construction, was crippled by a strike. A group of Welsh merchants looking for alternative supplies discovered the Summerside deposits and became interested. However before they could make the necessary arrangements with the Reid Newfoundland Company who owned the site, one of their number, Owen J Owen, managed to secure it for himself. Owen seems to have been something of a sly businessman. Back home in the United Kingdom he raised some capital and started a company called the Bay of Islands Slate Syndicate. He took on eight of his countrymen, Welsh quarrymen, and then returned to Newfoundland where he received a large order from Reid for 30,000 slates for the roof of the new railway station in St John’s, and he set to work to get the quarry into operation. As with the York Harbour Copper Mine, incompetence, or poor management, or both, seemed to prevail, for very soon Owen was deserted by three of his quarrymen, and  

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118 Some of the preceding information is from Martin, Wendy: *Once upon a Mine*. Some details of the boarding house and the death of John Sheppard are confirmed by Mr Kenneth Druggett of Lark Harbour, is the son of James P Druggett and Sarah, and also the maternal grandson of the late William and Priscilla Murrin. The body of John Sheppard, aged 41, was recovered from the mine by James P Druggett and another miner, identity unknown. John Sheppard is buried in Lark Harbour Cemetery.  


120 Martin, p45.
soon after that his foreman accidentally blew up both himself and the workshop area of the mine. The remaining Welshmen complained that the Newfoundlanders who worked alongside them worked too fast, and rather foolishly Owen laid the Newfoundland workers off, thus alienating the local population. This hints at difficulties between the locals and the Welsh miners.

More trouble arose when in 1903 Fred Carter, a resident of Summerside, complained that the quarry was trespassing on his property. He demanded $4,000 in cash payment and immediate withdrawal from the site. The company began moving to another site, until one of the Welshmen still remaining married a local woman twenty-six years his senior. No doubt regretting his marriage, he refused then to live with her. She threatened legal action, so that her husband and another Welshman fled to Cape Breton. Owen himself then also left very quickly to return to Wales, perhaps in the interest of his own safety.

A new manager, John F Stewart, replaced Owen, and for a brief period the quarry had a fresh lease on life. New galleries were opened, and a pier, tramway, and workshop were built. Things were looking promising and thousands of slates had been cut and stacked ready to be shipped when news was received that Stewart’s wife back in England was suddenly ill. Immediately he left for Britain apparently without making adequate arrangements for the proper running of the quarry, and it returned once again to the confusion it had experienced prior to his arrival. Again a combination of incompetent management, lack of demand, and slackening of price for the slate ensued, causing insuperable problems, and by 1909 the quarry closed, although a quantity had been ordered for the Railway Station in St John’s and some had been cut. It was never shipped slate and all that had been cut remained there. Over the years it was said to have provided writing surfaces for several generations of local school children.  

Meanwhile, unknown to the principals of the Summerside venture, the Birchy Cove quarry site, had been staked by the roguish Owen before his hurried return to Wales. Although not very competent as a quarry manager, Owen had some considerable skills as a promoter, or perhaps more accurately as a confidence artist. He managed to interest another group, the Newfoundland Exploration Syndicate, in sponsoring this mine, with himself as operator. After an abortive attempt at a Nelson’s Day observation using a steam drill to bore holes to fire a 21-blast salute, Owen was again dismissed. Still not giving up, he returned to England where he managed to interest a British group in forming the Long Range (Newfoundland) Slate Quarries. The company then hired him to run the mine. After another enthusiastic restart, followed by a series of problems culminating in a strike over wages, Owen became ill and the quarry fell once more into decline, finally closing down around the end of 1908. Owen J Owen is perhaps one of the slicker entrepreneurs Newfoundland has

121 Martin, p46.
known, although similar methods of operation are far from uncommon as some of Newfoundland’s later history can attest.

It is unfortunate that both the Copper Mine and the two Slate Quarries were plagued with incompetence. The copper ore was said to be of a high grade, and would presumably have fetched a good price on the growing market for electrical wiring materials. The Slate Quarries also offered a quality product which would have found a ready market both on the Island and for export.

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Home built by the late Mr Frederick Sheppard, about 1930

Circa 1900, this house in Frenchman’s Cove has now disappeared
1. A New Beginning

“... the brightness of a new day ...”  122  Those were the words of Sir Robert Bond as he, along with most Newfoundlanders, rejoiced at the removal of the legally-sanctioned yoke of French interference in the internal affairs of the Island—for such is what it amounted to in the eyes of most Newfoundlanders. The exception was perhaps a small number of West Coast fishermen who had reaped minor benefits from it by selling bait to the French fishing vessels, or by acting as caretakers of French onshore fishing installations during the off-season months. Few countries have had the misfortune of being burdened with an obligation such as that imposed on the people of Newfoundland by Britain since 1713: a liability towards the assumption of which they had virtually no effective input for centuries. But under that obligation, which governed the very heart of their livelihood, the cod fishery, they had lived for almost two centuries. Great was the euphoria in 1904 when finally that imposition came to an end.

For the next few years Newfoundland enjoyed a considerable degree of prosperity, although unfortunately not much of it percolated down to the less wealthy. The direct taxation system of the time, which was mostly import duties, favoured the wealthy at the expense of the poor, as such direct taxes are wont

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122  “The French Shore Question has been settled after years and years of vain endeavour... No other Convention ever contemplated the abandonment by the French of their establishments on the Treaty Shore. This does more, it heralds the near approach of the time when even the memory of their presence will fade like a fevered dream before the brightness of a new day.”  From the speech of Sir Robert Bond before the Newfoundland House of Assembly, 1904 April 21, shortly after the signing in London, on 1904 April 08, of the Convention between Britain and France, respecting Newfoundland and West and Central Africa, reported in the Evening Telegram, St John’s, on 1904 April 22, and quoted by Chadwick, in *Newfoundland: Island into Province*, pp 108-9.
to do. In 1908 import duties of between forty and fifty percent had to be paid on many household and personal items such as furniture, china, boots, shoes, and ready-made clothing, which were not manufactured on the Island. Consequently the typical outport resident who made his living through the fishery and was at the lower end of Newfoundland’s industrial working class, though he was perhaps better off than ever before, was poor compared with his counterparts in Canada, the USA, or Britain, or even with his compatriots in Eastern Newfoundland, especially St John’s. There was little ready cash in the outports, which still survived on the infamous truck system where fishermen delivered their catch to the local merchant who then allowed them credit in his store, but rarely cash. Therefore unless they were very lucky the working people were forced to deal only with the merchant in their own isolated community, and with no other, because they almost never had any actual cash. That merchant himself, depending on the size of his business, may also in turn have been dependent on conditions imposed by another larger business elsewhere.

In the Bay of Islands life was similar to that in other parts of the Island, except that industrial development was even later in coming here. The deprivation of two centuries could not be rectified overnight.

2. Putting the Hum in the Humber

As early as 1900 R G Reid the railway builder had suggested the establishment of a newsprint mill on the West Coast, but nothing had come of it. Such an enterprise was established in Grand Falls in 1905 with the inception of the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company, and people from the outports had flocked there to work and make their homes, incontestable proof that it could be done. When the newsprint mill idea did not take root on the West Coast, however, the Reids did not give up. In 1914/15 another venture was promulgated: a fertiliser plant with a pulp mill as a subsidiary. This was to be a joint undertaking between the Reid brothers and Mr “Carbide” Wilson. At a cost of eighteen million dollars, it would use Florida phosphates, Nova Scotia coal (until that of Bay St George could be developed), local sand from the Bay of Islands, and locally generated electricity. However by 1917 nothing had been done, and the project had fallen through.

World War I had been relatively generous to the Newfoundland economy, although a huge number of her young men lost their lives. (Of 26 from Lark Harbour and York Harbour who served in 1914-1918, five were killed in action.) Then, after the war, the price of fish began to decline. At the same time large numbers of soldiers and sailors recently demobilised from the armed forces returned home needing work. Many of these young men who had volunteered with patriotic fervour had tasted the better life of their contemporaries in Britain and Canada, and were no longer content to try to eke out a living in the fishing industry, which

123 Chadwick, p124
promised hard and dangerous work with little remuneration.

In 1919 Sir Richard Squires, a Liberal, became Prime Minister of Newfoundland (PM 1919-1923) and immediately he set about trying to introduce industrial development to the West Coast. After several attempts the necessary financing was put in place and in 1923 July work began on construction of the newsprint mill at the tiny community of Corner Brook named after the brook which entered the Humber Arm at its southeast “corner” just east of Curling. The old Silver and Company Lumber Mill, then owned by Christopher Fisher, was purchased as the site for the huge pulp mill. As well as the mill itself and its support facilities which included a hydroelectric power plant at Deer Lake, with fifty kilometres of transmission lines, and ships to carry the finished newsprint to its markets, an entire town with its infrastructure had to be built. By 1928, when the Newfoundland Power and Paper Company turned over operations to the International Power and Paper Company of Newfoundland, over 51 million dollars had been spent, and by 1930 additional expenditures had brought the total to over 57½ million dollars. But also, by the end of those seven years, almost 600,000 tons of newsprint had been produced, with a value of almost 37 million dollars, and a small but thriving town had come into existence.

From the beginning of its construction the mill at Corner Brook had a huge influence on life in the Bay of Islands. As the fisheries since about 1850, and the railway and mines in the 1890s had brought new settlers to the area, so the mill brought many more in the 1920s, and some of the young families who had established themselves in the communities of the Outer Bay were drawn away again, into the new city that grew around the mill where they started new lives vastly different from those they had been used to. In addition to the jobs at the mill itself, peripheral industries in the supply and service sector developed, and other jobs were generated as men with initiative established small enterprises selling logs to the mill, or providing other services needed in the growing industrial town. For the first time the Bay of Islands offered real opportunities outside the traditional occupations of fishing and subsistence farming.

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124 Financing has always been a problem for Newfoundland because of her comparatively small population and lack of a solid base for investment from Newfoundlanders themselves. In more recent times exactly the same problem arose and the Province was forced to accept financial terms imposed by others. This then precipitated a choice between accepting those terms or forgoing the development. The issue of the transmission of power from Churchill Falls to mainland markets is one such case: the Government of Quebec refused to allow Newfoundland a right-of-way to construct transmission lines, and insisted that the power must be sold to Hydro Quebec at the Labrador provincial boundary. Premier Smallwood signed a long-term agreement for which he has been soundly criticised since the value of electrical power rose during the late years of the 20th century and most of the profits generated at Churchill Falls went to Quebec, not Newfoundland. However this criticism was made with the benefit of hindsight and was unfair to Smallwood. For further information see Smallwood, Joseph R: I Chose Canada, pp443-470.

3. Optimism, Independence and Disillusionment

While it would be true that with the successful operation of the West Coast paper mill the Bay of Islands and even the Island as a whole experienced greater prosperity than ever before, in absolute terms the economy still left much to be desired. In industrial production Newfoundland was not competitive with the rest of North America, but the optimism of the people, epitomised in J R Smallwood’s *The New Newfoundland*, knew no bounds. In keeping with this optimism, public spending proceeded unchecked. There lacked the good planning that would have helped to bring the essential twentieth century infrastructure within reach of most of the Island’s population, and Newfoundlanders still did little by their way of life to encourage great hopes for a constructive future. The settler mentality survived and flourished. Isolation rather than congregation was an ingrained habit, and [religious] denominational differences continued to run deep. Even by 1920 Newfoundland could boast only three settlements outside St John’s with populations of more than 4,000. Scattered outports, strung around 6,000 miles of coastline, many of them still inaccessible by road or rail from the interior, would have placed an intolerable burden on a central administration far wealthier than Newfoundland. The result was that medical and social services, communications and anything more than rudimentary education had to be supplied at excessive cost or not at all. And in the education field the jealous vigour of the various faiths more often than not led to three or four understaffed and ill-equipped schools.
operating in competition with each other in one small community when a single school, providing ready access to all faiths for religious teaching, could have revolutionised and brought about great economies in educational systems and standards throughout the Island.  

Lark Harbour was a typical example of such a small community, and almost half a century would elapse (until 1961) before a usable road linked it to Corner Brook and mains electricity became available. According to the Census of 1921, Lark Harbour had three schools, two Church of England and one Methodist, with 73 pupils and 3 teachers between them; York Harbour had one Roman Catholic school with 27 pupils and 1 teacher. With an average of 25 pupils per teacher, Lark Harbour could have had three teachers concentrating their efforts in manageable classes each comprising three or four grades, instead of three teachers separately attempting to cover the entire grade spread that was present in each school. This was at a time when the rest of the western world was establishing improved elementary and secondary schools within easy access of everyone, and technical schools and universities in most of its major centres. Small wonder that the few dollars Newfoundland could muster for education had minimal effect.

4. The downward spiral to bankruptcy

Spending continued. Imports exceeded exports. The public debt, at $43 million or $165 per capita in 1920, continued to increase. Newfoundland however failed to modernise her fishery, continuing to produce salt fish which even then was suffering from a limited market, mostly in countries with economies similar to her own. This allowed other countries with more efficient fishing facilities to steal her more profitable markets, and income from the fishery declined, forcing the Island further into debt. The mills at Corner Brook and Grand Falls helped significantly to slow down the spiral towards bankruptcy, but could not prevent it. 

For a country dependent on just a handful of main industries (the fishery; pulp and paper, mining) which were suffering through very hard times in a world plagued by the Great Depression of the 1930s, such a debt load was disastrous. Newfoundland was caught in the economic vortex that besets those whose expenditures exceed their earnings. The debt was soon over $100 million, with interest amounting annually to $5 million, to be paid out of revenue of only $7 million, leaving little to fund the increasing needs of the people once the debt charges had been paid. With the onset of the Depression around the world, which caused

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126 Chadwick, p129.

127 This was much more than a census. Its detailed information on commodity production, for example, made it more of a Domesday Book for Newfoundland than a traditional census.

128 See Appendix

129 Chadwick, p129, quoting The Cambridge History of the British Empire.
further reductions in value and quantity of goods produced for export along with increases in the cost of servicing the debt, Newfoundland quietly approached insolvency. Ingenious stopgap measures were introduced to service the interest payments as they came due every six months: a loan from Britain to cover interest; a similar loan from Canada next time; yet another time the sale of a monopoly of the Island’s petroleum market to Imperial Oil of Canada. A growing number of people became unemployed, and fishermen who continued fishing found no sale for their catches. Those who could not make ends meet were given a pitiful dole of $1.80 worth of provisions per month. Indeed, the Colony was fast approaching total bankruptcy. It had now become clear that Newfoundland was not going to be able to recover on her own, and drastic measures were needed.

On 1933 February 17, a Royal Commission 130 was appointed to investigate Newfoundland’s financial status, and on 1933 October 04, almost eight months later, it presented its Report. 131 A suggestion that the Labrador territory recently awarded to Newfoundland should be leased or sold was solidly denied. Confederation with Canada was mooted again. The final recommendation of the Report was the suspension of Responsible Government and the formation of a Commission to assume power “until such time as the Island may become self-supporting again.” 132

Shortly after the publication of the Report the British Government offered to enter an agreement with Newfoundland on the suggested terms, subject to the approval of both the Newfoundland Legislature and the British Parliament. Late in 1933, during the Prime Ministership of Frederick C Alderdice (PM 1932-1934), that approval was given and the Newfoundland Act was passed. On 1934 January 30, with very little further discussion, Britain assumed responsibility for the Colony’s finances, and the six Commissioners took up their appointments. Two weeks later, on 1934 February 16, Responsible Government was suspended, the Commissioners were sworn in, and Newfoundland was formally placed under Government by Commission which lasted for fifteen years until 1949 March 31. 133

130 Known as “the Amulree Commission”. There were three Members: Lord Amulree (William Warrender Mackenzie, British barrister, British Government’s appointee, and Chairman), Sir William Stavert (from Prince Edward Island, Canadian financial advisor to the Newfoundland Government and Newfoundland’s appointee) and Charles Alexander Magrath (from Ontario, politician and Canadian government appointee).

131 It has been suggested that the Report of the Commission, written not by the chairman but by a senior civil servant in London, Peter A Clutterbuck, was unfair in that it attributed Newfoundland’s economic problems to incompetent management and profligate spending during years when the entire world was economically depressed. Clutterbuck emphasised particularly the years 1920 to 1932, when the Colony’s debt more than doubled, although he was prepared to admit that the difficulties were exacerbated by the Great Depression. Commissioner Magrath objected to the negative tone, but was unheeded, and the recommendations of the Report were accepted. Clutterbuck’s expertise however is not at issue, only his biased judgement, which a few months later resulted in the establishing of Commission Government. See Greg Malone, Don’t Tell the Newfoundlanders, Knopf, Canada, 2012, pages 7-8.

132 Chadwick, p161.

5. Government by Commission

The Commission Government years were not uneventful, comprising as they did the entire fifteen year period which included intense economic depression preceding the Second World War, the War itself, and the years leading up to the re-establishment of self-government in Newfoundland culminating in the decision to become a part of Canada. It was perhaps the most turbulent period in Newfoundland’s history. But out of the turmoil came a level of stability that enabled the Colony to repair some of the damage accumulated during the Dirty Thirties, and despite the widespread dislike of Government by Commission, considerable improvements were achieved in the areas of education and health.

The years from 1939 to 1949 brought greater prosperity than had been experienced for decades, resulting from the Island’s strategic position as a communications node between North America and Europe. It is well known how St John’s became the major starting point for transatlantic convoys, but perhaps lesser known is the Island’s function as a base for both the Royal Canadian and United States Air Forces. Gander, in central Newfoundland, Stephenville, in Bay St George on the West Coast, and Goose Bay in Labrador, became major refuelling and staging points for American and Canadian aircraft crossing the Atlantic. Stephenville’s Harmon Air Force Base was one of the military establishments constructed under the British-American Leased Bases Agreement 1940-41. As the only airstrip on the West Coast for a number of years, it became instrumental in the postwar economic development of the region until Deer Lake became the West Coast’s leading airport because of its more central location and much greater area of level terrain. Many residents of Bay St George found employment at the Harmon Base, and many also socialised with and married Americans from the base, until its closing in 1966. 134

No discussion of the West Coast during the years of the Second World War would be complete without mention of the tragic loss of the SS Caribou. Built for the Newfoundland Railway and launched in Rotterdam, Netherlands, in 1925, at 81 metres (265 ft) she was less than a third the length of the 1911 RMS Titanic’s 269 metres (882.5 ft) and less than a quarter the length of the 1934 RMS Queen Mary’s 310 metres (1,019 ft). However with her ice-breaker hull, her top speed of 14.5 knots (almost 27km/h) and her state-of-the-art steam heating and electric lighting in all her cabins, the Caribou was the pride and joy of her owners and an icon of progress for Newfoundland. Sadly, though, while crossing from North Sydney, NS, to Port aux Basques with 237 passengers and crew on board, on the night of 1942 October 13 at 3:51am she was torpedoed by the German U-69 submarine about 37km from her home port, and 137 souls were lost. A later namesake, the MV Caribou in the Davie Shipyards built in Lauzon, QC and launched in 1985, served on the

134 Construction of military bases by the USA peaked in Newfoundland in 1942, with almost 20,000 Newfoundlanders earning an average annual wage of about $1,500, an excellent wage at the time. Labour shortages resulted, reducing production at the Corner Brook paper mill. A boom economy resulted in budget surpluses totalling almost $30 millions.
same route from 1986 until 2010 and also became a great favourite for many who worked or travelled on her. The two ships were named after the Newfoundland Regiment whose emblem is the caribou, Newfoundland’s native ungulate. The regiment achieved fame for its heroism during the slaughter of World War I at Beaumont Hamel in 1916 when only 110 men of 780 survived.

6. Confederation Considerations

The prosperity resulting from the war years not only gave the people of Newfoundland a renewed hope in their future, but it also reawakened ideas about Confederation with Canada. This was a concept which had always found greater favour among the inhabitants of Western Newfoundland than among those on the East Coast, but competing with it at times had also been suggestions of political union with the United States. However the loyal “Britishness” of so many Newfoundlanders, especially on the West Coast, meant that this, if it was an option at all, always took second place to union with Canada. Even as far back as 1900, a time when there was justifiable dissatisfaction among many Newfoundlanders on account of the lack of a solution to the French Shore question, this loyalty was striking. The following item from The Western Star, Corner Brook, of 1900 April 04, illustrates the point most effectively:

A correspondent writing us from Lark Harbour describes the loyalty of the residents there in spite of the fact that they have been harshly treated in the past by the English warships. On receipt of the news of British successes in South Africa general jubilations would follow. Public meetings, fireworks and hearty cheering kept the British blood aglow. Bonfires blazed on hilltops and everything that could burn was used to heighten the flames of enthusiasm. The remains of a wrecked American vessel, which laid on this beach for some time, were completely burnt up; and while the excitement lasted it was shared in by men, women, and children.

The earliest references to Confederation had occurred in connection with the Great American and European Short Line Railway proposed by Sir Sandford Fleming in the 1860s. At that time the concept of union with Canada, though rejected, was not completely forgotten, and always existed as a more popular undercurrent of political thought on the West Coast than on the East Coast. It was raised again by Prime Minister Sir Robert Bond (PM 1900-1909) on a trip to England in 1902. He reiterated Fleming’s argument that a traveller from London to New York could make the trip in 124 hours, with only 70 hours at sea, cutting thirty-two hours off the current time required under favourable conditions, and that it would be a sufficient inducement for Newfoundland to enter Confederation with Canada. The benefits to Newfoundland, and particularly to the West Coast, would have been phenomenal at that time.  

135 The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Neville Chamberlain, was also reported then as saying that “a union with Canada would be the only solution

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135 The Western Star, Corner Brook, 1902 July 31.
of the French Shore problem”. 136 A former Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Hon Daniel Joseph Greene (PM 1894-1895), speaking to a group in Sydney, NS, had said that there was “a strong element in Newfoundland in favour of such a step [ie Confederation]. People who were opposed to it two years ago are now strongly in favour of it.” And a Codroy farmer made a case strongly advocating Confederation because it would mean the removal of duties on farm equipment. However there were dissenting views also. Mr M P Gibbs, a St John’s lawyer who had been one of the two MHAs for St George’s District until the last election, told the Sydney Post that feeling in Newfoundland was averse to Confederation, and that it would be many years before the people would favour it. 137 It is plain that opinions varied widely on the issue, depending very much on one’s particular viewpoint, but there was considerable support, especially on the West Coast, despite Mr Gibbs’s remark which may have represented a personal St John’s viewpoint rather than that of many of his West Coast constituents.

The years of prosperity that occurred during and after World War I did not help the cause of Confederation. New industries that developed made people feel as if the Island really could succeed alone, and it was not until things turned abysmally bad during the Great Depression and the Commission of Government was established, that Newfoundland gave serious consideration to becoming part of Canada. World War II rescued the economy and brought a degree of prosperity too, but the strategic importance of Newfoundland in the defence of the North Atlantic during the early years of the Cold War also caused the Allied powers, especially Canada, our closest neighbour, to look closely at Newfoundland and to devise means whereby the Colony could be assisted to more permanent stability.

It became clear that it was neither desirable nor very feasible from Britain’s viewpoint to continue maintaining Newfoundland as a dependent colony. It was decided that the best arbiters of Newfoundland’s future would be Newfoundlanders themselves. Nominations were therefore called for a National Convention mandated to study the Colony’s economic situation and make recommendations for its political future. On 1946 June 21 elections were held. Charles H Ballam, whose name is commemorated in the Ballam Bridge at the mouth of the Humber River, and Pierce Fudge were both elected for the Humber District which then comprised the entire Bay of Islands. At this time also a new, different and dynamic personality in the Newfoundland political arena made his first elected appearance: broadcaster and journalist Joseph Roberts Smallwood. Already an ardent vocal advocate for Confederation, he was elected to the District of Bonavista Centre with 2,129 votes as opposed to his rival who gathered only 277.

136 The Western Star, Corner Brook, 1901 May 28.
137 The Western Star, Corner Brook, 1901 Sep 06. Michael P Gibbs, KC, 1870 Mar 25 - 1944 Nov 07. A St John’s lawyer, one of the Members of the House of Assembly who occupied seats on the West Coast; also President of the Legislative Council at some point in his political career.
For the next two years debate and discussion followed. Smallwood, from the start almost the only one, and certainly the most enthusiastic, quickly emerged as the leader of those who supported Confederation, while the Anti-Confederationists, predominantly the old Water Street mercantile group and some elements of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, seemed to be having difficulty uniting themselves. As had been the case at least for nearly a century, St John’s was opposed to any course other than Responsible Government, largely because of the belief of the old and disproportionately influential merchant families who felt that anything else would result in major business losses for them. In addition, Roman Catholics were urged by Archbishop Roche to vote for Responsible Government. However the Roman Catholic Bishop of St George’s, Mgr O’Reilly, rejected the views of his superior, and did not encourage his flock to support Responsible Government. West Coast Catholics were thus allowed to vote according to their own consciences.

Finally a referendum was set for 1948 June 03. St John’s residents and most Roman Catholics were expected to vote overwhelmingly for Responsible Government. The West Coast was known to be more favourable towards Confederation, and may even have been the deciding factor in swinging the vote to the side of Confederation in the second referendum. Of the eligible voters, 88% cast ballots, a strong turnout.

When no clear majority decision emerged from this first ballot, a second vote was needed, this time with only two choices on the ballot. It was at this time, after the First Referendum and before the Second, that the famous incident of the “Loyal Orange Letter” occurred. Incensed by the political interference of the Catholic Church and encouraged by Smallwood and his pro-Confederation supporters, the Orange Grand Lodge, effectively leader of the staunch Protestant organisation, adopted a resolution which was circulated by Grand Master Chesley Fillier to all Lodges in Newfoundland. In it Orangemen were urged to make their decision on political grounds, not to be influenced by religious sectarianism, and “to use every effort to bring such attempts to naught.” It is not certain how much effect this letter had on voters; but given the acerbic relations that sometimes existed between Protestants and Catholics, it would be surprising for there to be none.

138 A Protestant fraternal society founded in Ireland in 1795 to commemorate the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the Loyal Orange Benevolent Association became established in Canada around 1812. In 1863 the first Lodge, Royal Oak, was established in St John’s, Newfoundland. Spreading quickly over the ensuing years, lodges were formed in many small communities. A branch of the LOBA existed in Lark Harbour with its own Lodge but membership declined and by the year 2000 the Lodge itself, located near the present Town Hall, was demolished. Over the years the LOBA became an important social force with many members, especially in outports with predominantly Protestant populations. David Smallwood, grandfather of Joseph R Smallwood, was a founder member of the LOBA in Newfoundland, and other members of his family, including J R Smallwood, were members. Other members included many of the Puddester family, a business dynasty of St John’s, as well as other influential Protestant families in Newfoundland. The LOBA was instrumental in establishing a number of charitable foundations across the Island and in Labrador. A ladies auxiliary was also formed in 1913. For further information on the LOBA, see http://canadianorangehistoricalsite.com/index-24.php For the Battle of the Boyne, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Boyne

The date set for the Second Referendum was 1948 July 22, forty-seven days, roughly a month and a half after the First. Commission of Government, which had received only about a third of the support of either of the other options, was eliminated from the Second Referendum, while Confederation garnered 15,213 more votes compared with Responsible Government’s increase of only 2,104. The numbers suggest that most of those who had previously voted for Commission must have voted for Confederation this time, although 2,647 fewer votes were cast. The reduced total of votes cast may have been due to weather, often an important factor in elections; or perhaps more fishing activity on referendum day. Voter fatigue may have played a part, though the emotion generated after the Orange Letter was circulated would seem to negate that.

RESULTS WERE:  

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<th>First Referendum</th>
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<th>Second Referendum</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td># Votes</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td># Votes</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Responsible Govt</td>
<td>69,230</td>
<td>44.87%</td>
<td>71,334</td>
<td>47.66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>For Confederation</td>
<td>63,110</td>
<td>40.91%</td>
<td>78,323</td>
<td>52.34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>For Commission of Govt</td>
<td>21,944</td>
<td>14.22%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL votes cast</td>
<td>152,304</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>149,657</td>
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The following chart compares vote distribution between the Avalon and all other Districts

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<th>1st Referendum</th>
<th>2nd Referendum</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsible Govt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avalon</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Districts</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
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The Avalon electoral districts maintained support for Responsible Government with a drop of only 1% while increasing by 9% for Confederation; the rest of the country saw a 16% increase for Confederation and 4% for Responsible Government. Catholic voters tended to favour Responsible Government.

Numbers taken from pp 204-206 in Chadwick, *Newfoundland: Island into Province*, Cambridge 1967. Other sources quote slightly different numbers, but the variations are not significant enough to change the overall outcome or the numerous comments that have been made about the integrity or accuracy of the counts.

http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/referendums.html
7. Success

In the Second Referendum the results were conclusive, if not overwhelming. Smallwood, who had campaigned so energetically for this outcome, felt himself finally vindicated. There were regional differences which were similar in both referenda, where Avalon favoured Responsible Government more than 2 to 1 while the rest of the Island (including Labrador) favoured Confederation more than 2 to 1. However overall the second Referendum yielded a five percent majority; it was far from a landslide, but the way was now clear for detailed constitutional arrangements to be prepared.

Fifty Terms of Union, of which two were of special interest because of the exceptions they defined, were negotiated between Canada and the new Province of Newfoundland. Term 17 replaced Section 93 of the British North America Act, allowing the Newfoundland Legislature to “have exclusive authority to make laws relating to education”, but not “to make laws prejudicially affecting any right or privilege with respect to denominational schools, common [amalgamated] schools, or denominational colleges, that any class or classes of persons have by law in Newfoundland at the date of Union”. This provision was included because the early schools in Newfoundland had been founded and operated largely by the churches, some of which who were reluctant to relinquish their control. This was a possibility if the legislation regulating the publicly-operated schools in some provinces of Canada at the time was applied without change to Newfoundland. Term 17 also provided that funding should continue equally for all of these schools and colleges.

Term 46 permitted oleomargarine and margarine, a staple for the outports of Newfoundland, to be manufactured and sold within Newfoundland, but not to be shipped to other provinces of Canada. These exceptions in Term 46 were included because of long-standing tradition relating to both matters in Newfoundland where there was a large market for margarine in the outports, and to satisfy concerns expressed by the large dairy industry of Québec. Changes were eventually passed.\(^{142}\)

At midnight on 1949 March 31, Thursday, Newfoundland became Canada’s tenth province, under the premiership of Joseph Roberts Smallwood, the ‘little man from Gambo’ who thereafter styled himself ‘the only living Father of Confederation’.

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\(^{142}\) The reference to “any class or classes of persons” assumed great significance in the 1990s when it became necessary to change Term 17 to allow the education system of Newfoundland and Labrador to be reorganised without the denominational element. A slender majority in the Newfoundland Education Referendum of 1995 September 05 had approved the proposal of the Liberal Government of Clyde Wells to reform the denominational school system. After its passage in a free vote of all parties in the Newfoundland House of Assembly, the constitutional change had to be passed by the Parliament of Canada, which occurred on 1996 June 04, then by the Senate of Canada. Lobbying by the hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland caused acerbic debate and some delays at each of these junctures. The issue, needed only to satisfy Newfoundland’s requirement, was then further obfuscated by the insistence of Québec’s Bloc Québécois indépendantiste federal party to establish a precedent for a simple majority “fifty percent plus one vote” passage of any constitutional change. Such a requirement if passed could possibly enable much easier passage of any potential future Québec vote for independence. Consequently there was reluctance of some Federalists to cast a vote that might facilitate the Bloc’s intent. The Senate did however finally vote in favour of the measure and it was passed.
POSTSCRIPT
TO THE SECOND REFERENDUM OF 1948

The Second Referendum resulted in a clear, but moderate, majority vote for Confederation. It is interesting to note that of the twenty-five Electoral Districts only those on the Avalon Peninsula did NOT return a majority vote for Confederation. The remaining sixteen, including the single Labrador district, voted FOR Confederation.

J R Smallwood later remarked that the West Coast played a decisive role in the success of the Confederation vote.
“The only living Father of Confederation”

Joseph Roberts Smallwood
1900 December 24 - 1991 December 17
during an election campaign in the 1960s

(From a 3D card distributed to voters)