TOPIC 3.3

The Resident Fishery

What role does the fishery play in the province today?

What are the best arguments for and against continuing the seal hunt today?

3.35 Hard work
Handlining from dories consisted of using a single line with one or more baited or lured hooks attached. Quick jerks of the line, called "jigging," are an effective way to snag the fish on the hook.

Introduction

The fisheries remained the main source of livelihood for residents throughout the nineteenth century. Although there were several types of fisheries, as a resident once stated in an 1879 newspaper: "(Those in) this isolated community have no choice of an occupation, and must pull upon a single line, and fish or die."

The Shore Fishery

After the migratory fishery ended at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Newfoundland fishery was conducted mainly in inshore waters using small boats. This shore fishery produced a lightly salted, hard-dried "shore" cure of fish that was preferred in foreign markets and had the advantage that no other nation produced it.

The fishery before the nineteenth century, both migratory and resident, had used hired servants to catch the fish and separate shore crews to cure it. However, the nineteenth century fishery used family members for both catching and curing. Hired hands augmented family labour in the boats where family alone could not crew them. These labourers usually received a share of the proceeds of the voyage – and hence were called **sharemen**.

New Technology

Contrary to the image of the unchanging outport, several innovations were introduced to the inshore fishery throughout the nineteenth century. New types of boats and fishing equipment were introduced, such as **dories** (of American origin) used in the bank fishery, and the use of the **long line** or **bultow** (of French origin) at mid-century.

The most important innovation in the shore fishery, however, was the **cod trap**. Invented in 1866 in Bonne Espérance, a small island (that belongs to Quebec) off the south coast of Labrador, it was widely used in the shore and Labrador fisheries by the 1890s. Although the cod trap caught more fish than **handlining**, the trap was expensive and needed bigger crews and boats to operate. Often family ties were used to acquire the gear and to form trap-fishing crews.

3.36 Cod drying at A.H. Murray's fishing premises, Water Street, St. John's

3.37 Interior of a fishhouse
Most likely depicting the French fishery c. 1850

Occupations	Number Involved
Persons Engaged in Catching and Curing Fish	38 578 (1227)
Able-bodied Seamen and Fishermen in Colony and Dependencies	20 311 (576)
Mechanics	1 970
Farmers	1 552 (145)
Merchants and Traders	689 (3)
Persons Engaged in Lumbering	334
Clergymen or Ministers	77
Doctors and Lawyers	71

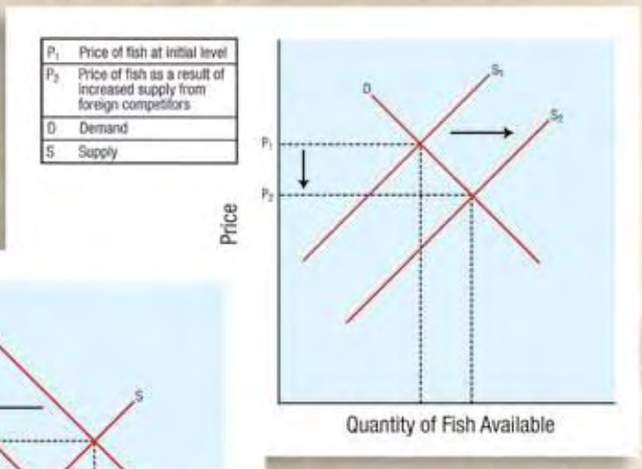
3.38 Occupations of residents of the island of Newfoundland, 1857 Census
(above) Figures in brackets indicate numbers for French Shore.

3.39 *Cod Trap on Bragg's Island*,
artist David Blackwood, 1994
The cod trap was a box of nets. Cod entered it by following a leader. Once inside, the cod found it difficult to get out.

Experiencing The Arts

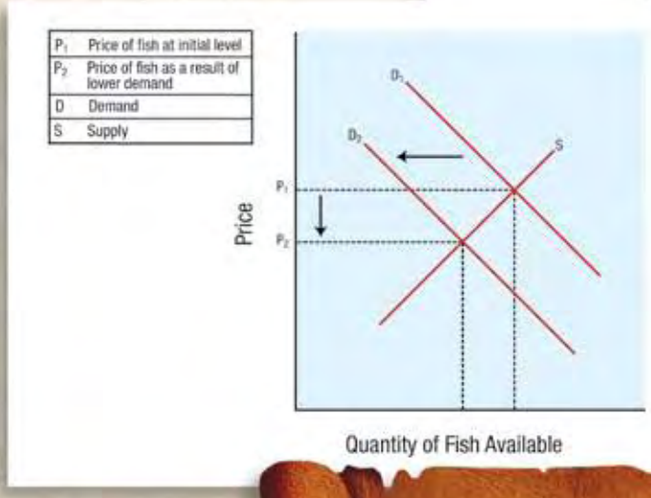
To see more of David Blackwood's work, turn to page 594.

3.40 Venison Tickle, Labrador, c. 1900
The Labrador fishery began around 1815, but had declined significantly by the early 1900s and ended in the early 1950s.

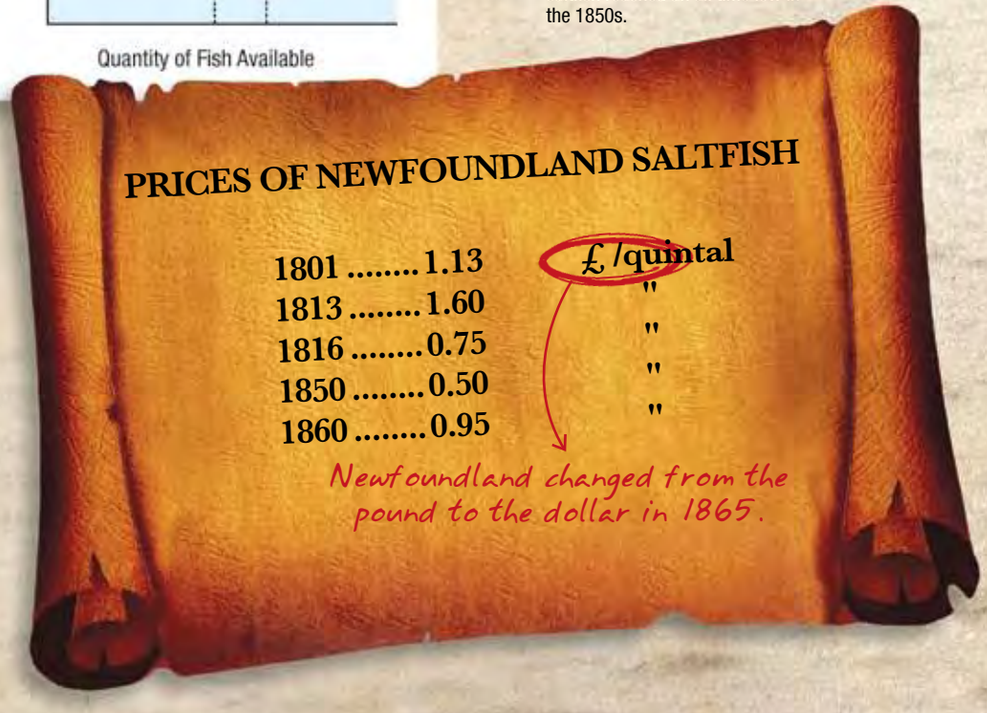


3.41 Supply and demand
The graph (right) shows the decline in the demand for fish when Britain no longer needed to maintain (and feed) a large army and navy. As a result there was less demand for fish (D_2), forcing prices down (P_2).

The graph (far right) shows the effect of additional fish being brought to market by foreign competitors re-entering the marketplace. A new supply of fish (S_2) is available, again forcing prices down (P_2).



3.42 Falling prices
With a decrease in demand and an increase in supply, the value of saltfish reached an all time low in the 1850s.



Labrador Fishery

In the early 1800s, there occurred one of the few booms in the fishery that the province has known. This boom was caused by the need to provision armies during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. However, when Britain's conflicts with America and France ended, the demand for fish fell, as did the price. The price fell even further when foreign competitors re-entered the market. After 1815 the markets collapsed.

In addition, depletion of cod stocks began to be a problem in Newfoundland in the 1800s as a rising population caught larger volumes of fish. Cod became scarce in areas where people had been fishing the longest, such as Conception, Trinity, and Bonavista Bays. Some fishers compensated for this by fishing farther from shore – moving from fishing grounds within the island's large bays to those on outer headland areas. Eventually, this search for more cod led fishers north.*

By the 1820s, increasing numbers of fishers began migrating from Newfoundland to Labrador to fish during the summer. This fishery served two purposes: it provided a use for sealing vessels in the off-season; and it allowed fishers from bays where the cod stocks were depleted to still earn a living. However, only those who possessed schooners, jack boats, or bully boats were able to travel north. As these fishers had to spend weeks or even months away from home, some brought their families with them for company and to help cure the catch.

*During the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, some fishers had resorted to fishing on the Northern Peninsula. They were forced to leave when the French returned to the "French Shore" after 1815, and consequently went to Labrador.

The coast of Labrador was returned to Newfoundland in 1809. See page 79, chapter one.

3.43 A bully boat
Bonne Bay, 1909

The Labrador fishery consisted of two groups: **stationers** and **floaters**. Fishers who set up living quarters on shore and fished each day in small boats were known as stationers. Floaters lived and fished (usually with **seines** and handlines) on board their vessels and sailed up and down the Labrador coast, often travelling further north than stationers.

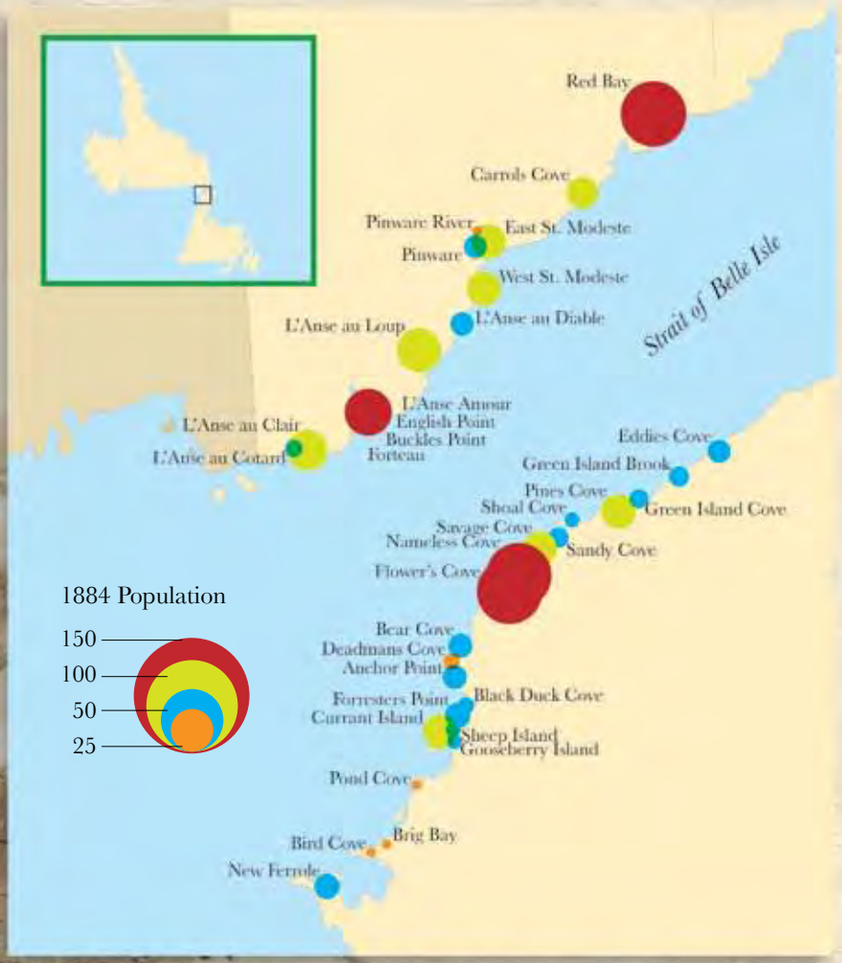
Floaters packed their fish in salt and brought it back to Newfoundland at the end of each season to be dried, while stationers salted and cured their fish on shore shortly after catching it. Both methods had drawbacks. Labrador's damp weather often resulted in a poorer cure for stationers, while floaters risked damaging their catch during the long voyage home. Generally, the Labrador fishery produced an inferior product which fetched a lower market price, but the catches were usually larger.

Over time, some Labrador fishers decided to remain on the Labrador coast. They settled mostly around the Labrador Straits and in southeastern Labrador, where various merchant firms operated, such as the highly successful Job Brothers and Company, which operated from c. 1750 to 1967.

3.45 Using what's available
Sod-covered dwellings were common in Labrador due to a lack of timber in some areas.

3.44 At home in the Big Land
Labrador livyer's dwelling, c. 1930. This was likely the family's residence by the sea. Note that children look healthy, robust, and well-clad, despite the poor dwelling appearance.

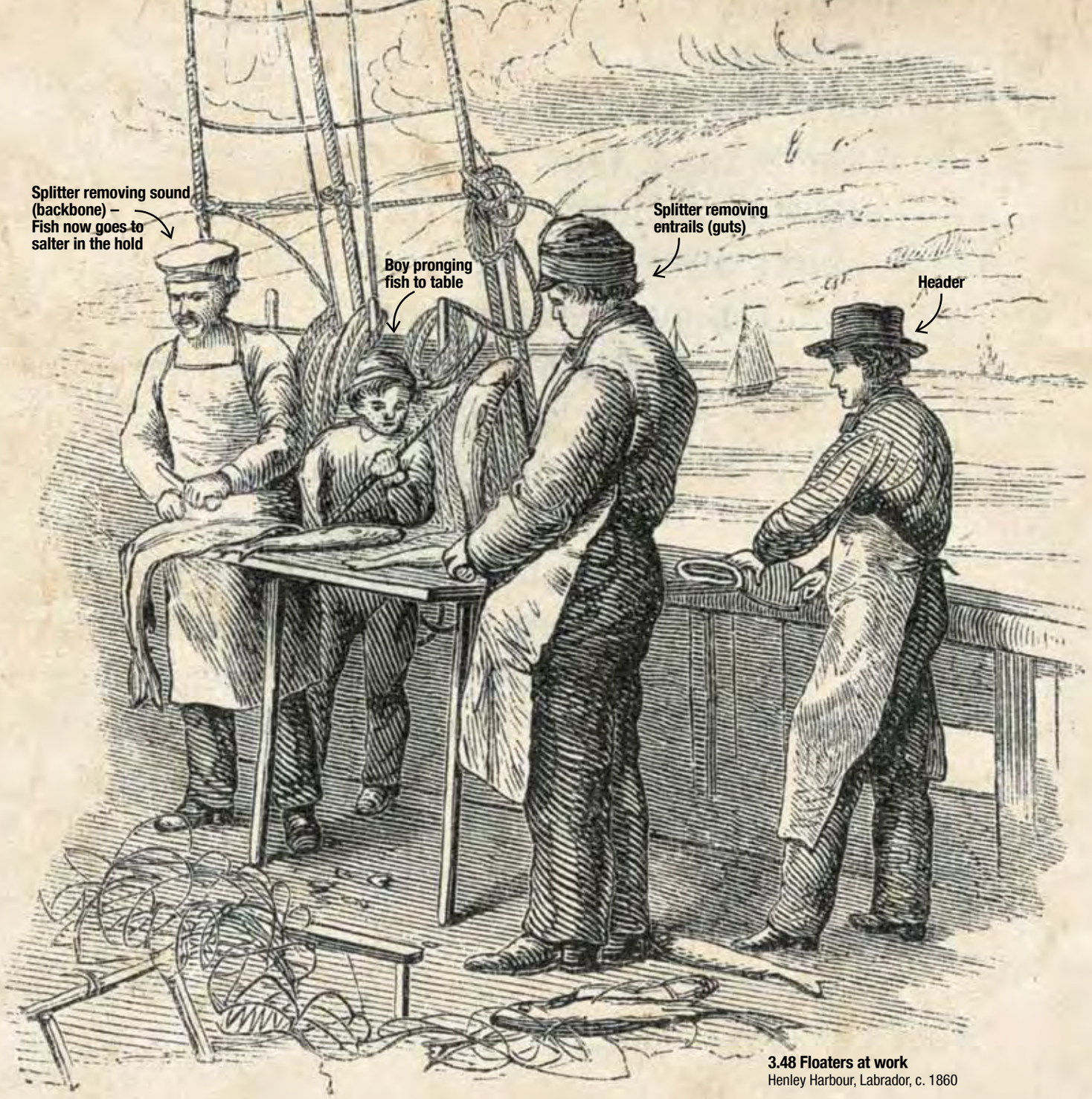
3.46 Early settlement goes north
As the Labrador fishery grew, so too did Labrador's population. The buildings in this visual represent a merchant's establishment. William Grey was a Church of England priest who spent many years in Newfoundland and Labrador. His description of this scene, which he drew in 1857, is as follows: "St. Francis Harbour. Here we shall find, perhaps, the best garden on Labrador, and the first church [of England] built on this [south] coast. It was consecrated by the Bishop of Newfoundland, 1853."



3.47 Settlement in the Straits, 1884
(Based on information from "The Demographic and Mercantile Bases of Initial Permanent Settlement in the Strait of Belle Isle" by Patricia A. Thornton in *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography,* Ed. John J. Mannion. ISER, MUN, 1977.)

"… fishing stations [are] busy with men and women during the fishing season … 'flakes' of poles or brush strew every level rock, covered with codfish drying in the sun."

– Charles Hallock, American author of the *Fishing Tourist*, published in 1873



3.48 Floaters at work
Henley Harbour, Labrador, c. 1860

By the mid-1860s, the catch rate for the cod fishery on Labrador's south coast began to decline. This may have been largely due to the pressure on the stocks by Newfoundland fishers, as well as American and Canadian fishers. To compensate for declining catches, some fishers began using more efficient gear, particularly cod traps, while others travelled further north to find new fishing grounds. The northward expansion, coupled with the use of new gear, for a time resulted in larger catches and allowed the colony to maintain or increase its exports. Some historians argue that this pattern masked the fact that older fishing grounds had been over-exploited.

Another factor that contributed to the decline of the Labrador fishery was the introduction of steamships in the 1870s. By the mid-1880s, fish from Iceland and Norway arrived at markets earlier than fish from Labrador. In their haste to beat the competition, shippers began to load steamers with fish at Labrador and send it directly to market. This meant that fish was often imperfectly cured and more difficult to sell.

In the beginning many stationers travelled to Labrador as passengers on schooners, and some continued to do this throughout the life of the Labrador fishery. In the late nineteenth century, however, the government hired steamships to take stationers northward. These stationers took their families, boats, fishing gear, lumber, firewood, household goods, and even livestock. Many went from places like Carbonear, Harbour Grace, and St. John's.

3.49 A popular American fishing station: Henley Harbour, Labrador, 1860
American fishers were given rights to fish off Labrador under the 1783 Treaty of Paris, and by 1803 were conducting a large fishery there. This was interrupted by the War of 1812, but they were back again by 1818. They continued to fish there until the 1860s, when they turned their attention to the Grand Banks. Fishers from England and Nova Scotia also frequently fished in Labrador.

A great jealousy exists between the Guernsey* adventurers, who occupy the western side of this bay, and the English families established upon the opposite shore. The latter stigmatize the former as cheats and swindlers; whilst the former represent the latter to be notoriously knavish in all their dealings. The fact is, that they are only envious of each other's gains; and the Guernsey people, by being the most industrious, are generally the most calumniated. The vessels of these thriving islanders are slightly built, and calculated to make speedy voyages: so that by hurrying out to NEWFOUNDLAND as early in the year as possible, they quickly procure cargoes of cod; and as speedily recrossing the Atlantic, they by this means succeed in getting the first of the Spanish and Portuguese markets, whereby they obtain a high price for their fish, and incur the resentment of those who are less expeditious in their mercantile speculations. There are, in all, about eighteen boats constantly employed at Forteau. During the fishing season, the English reside in Labrador all the winter; but the Guernseymen quit it in the autumn, and return thither again in the spring.

*Part of the Channel Islands located between England and France

3.50 An account of the Labrador fishery
From *Voyage of His Majesty's ship Rosamond to Newfoundland and the southern coast of Labrador* by Edward Chappell (1818)

FROM CONCEPTION BAY TO ST. JOHN'S

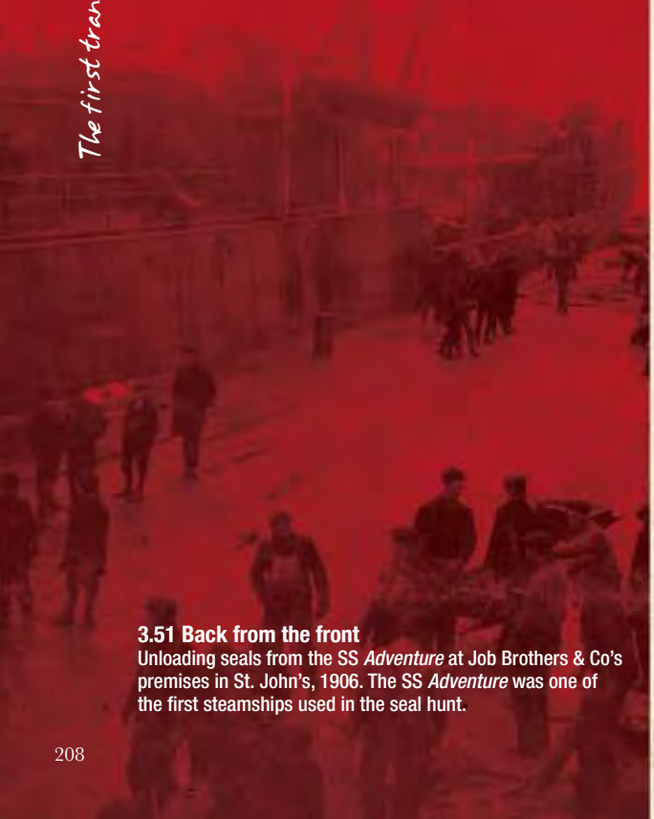
Until the late 1800s, the seal fishery was centred in Conception Bay – primarily in Harbour Grace, Carbonear, and Brigus. This fishery brought prosperity to this region and, in some areas, was more important than the shore fishery.

This began to change around the 1870s. Wealthier St. John's merchants began acquiring steamships for transporting cargo, but soon recognized their potential value for the seal fishery. These vessels were more efficient and, over time, began to displace wooden sailing ships. However, merchants in other areas lacked the capital to make these investments. As a result, the economy of Conception Bay declined. By 1900, St. John's firms controlled the entire sealing industry and men from the outports had to make their way to the capital if they wanted to find a berth on a sealing ship.

The first transatlantic steamship voyage was in 1819, but major improvements to steamships were made in the 1850s.

"When Mr. Walter Grieve sent the first sealing steamer to the ice it was a poor day for Newfoundland. The only consolation we can lay to our hearts is that steam was inevitable; it was sure to come, sooner or later … Politics and steam have done more than any other cause to ruin the middle class, the well-to-do dealers that once abounded in the out-ports."

– D.W. Prowse, historian



3.51 Back from the front
Unloading seals from the SS *Adventure* at Job Brothers & Co's premises in St. John's, 1906. The SS *Adventure* was one of the first steamships used in the seal hunt.

Seal Fishery

The commercial seal fishery began in the eighteenth century. In the beginning, English settlers caught seals, mainly harp seals, by nets* whenever the animals passed near to shore, or caught them by going out on the ice. They sometimes used small boats to hunt seals that were floating on ice pans near the shore. The best places for catching seals as they migrated were along the south Labrador coast, the Strait of Belle Isle, and the Newfoundland coast north of Twillingate. As a result, sealing encouraged permanent settlement in these areas because it offered a means of winter income.

*Seal hunting is sometimes referred to as a "fishery" because of this early use of nets.

Residents in southeastern Newfoundland became attracted to the profitable seal fishery at the end of the eighteenth century. As the Avalon Peninsula was off the route of the seal migrations, the only way to participate was to travel north and find the seals. In 1793, the first schooners sailed to the ice from St. John's, marking a turning point in the seal fishery. These schooners were the same ones used in the cod fishery.

In the 1800s the seal fishery came to rival the cod fishery in importance. At its peak in the 1830s and 1840s, it employed upwards of 14 000 men and comprised about a third of all exports by value (salt cod made up most of the rest). The most valuable product from seals was their oil.

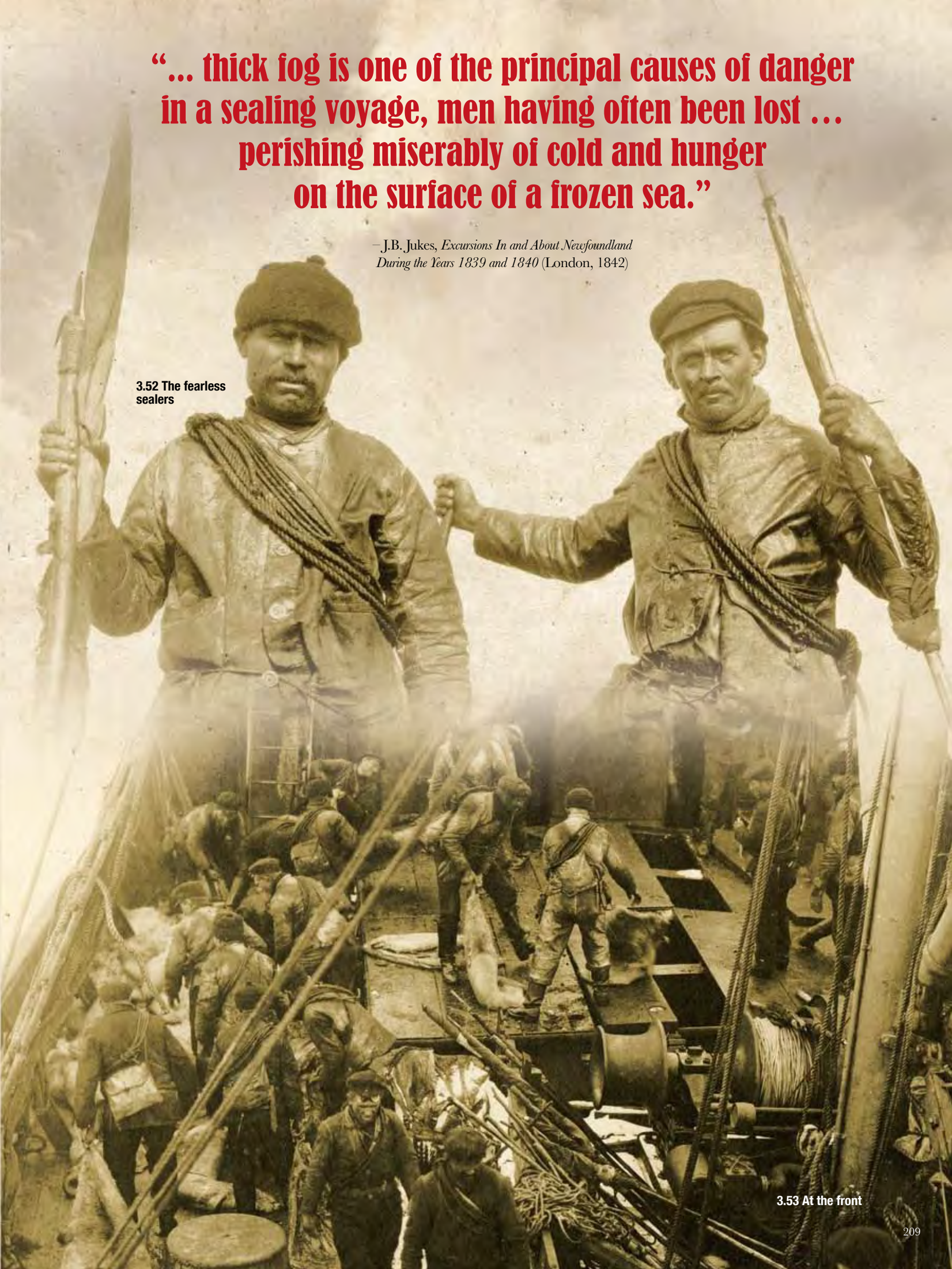
Most of the seal oil and pelts were exported to England, where there was a great demand. Seal oil was used for lighting homes and wharfs, streetlights, lighthouses, in soap manufacturing, and as a lubricant. Seal skins were used to make upholstery, gloves, boots, jackets, hats, and other items.

Despite its value, the seal hunt was a risky enterprise for all concerned. Ship owners sometimes lost their vessels and frequently failed to make any profit because they did not get enough pelts in one season, although one good year in the seal hunt could undo the effects of several bad ones. For sealers, the hunt meant danger on the ice floes, squalid conditions aboard ship, and little pay. However, this improved slightly after a sealers' strike in 1832 ensured they were paid in cash instead of credit.

By the 1850s, yields began to decrease because herds were in decline. The prices for seal oil also fell in the 1870s as petroleum alternatives were developed. Thereafter, the economic importance of sealing declined and by 1914 the industry made up only five per cent of the colony's exports – a dramatic drop from the 30 to 40 per cent during the first half of the nineteenth century.

"... thick fog is one of the principal causes of danger in a sealing voyage, men having often been lost ... perishing miserably of cold and hunger on the surface of a frozen sea."

–J.B. Jukes, *Excursions In and About Newfoundland During the Years 1839 and 1840* (London, 1842)



3.52 The fearless sealers

3.53 At the front

3.54 Location, location, location
Burin emerged as a significant port, due to its geographic proximity to the Banks. This image is a view of Burin, c. 1910, from an early postcard.

Bank Fishery

The original bank fishery was probably the oldest European fishery off our coast – engaged in by French, Spanish, Portuguese, and possibly English, from the early 1500s. The English fishery soon became a shore-based operation and remained well into the period of permanent settlement. An English bank fishery was begun off the southern Avalon Peninsula in the 1720s in response to failing inshore catches. It flourished up to the late 1780s, but then declined.

The Labrador, seal, and inshore fisheries showed signs of decline throughout the 1800s. The Newfoundland government, in an effort to stimulate the economy, offered subsidies encouraging fishers to again expand cod fishing to the Grand Banks. By the mid-1870s, fishers were arriving on the Banks in wooden schooners, sealing steamers, and other vessels ranging between 20 and 250 tons.

The bank fishery typically ran from March until October, but fishing schedules varied among different communities. Fishers living on the island's northeast coast, for example, often had to wait until April or May to leave because of ice. Vessels made three or four trips to the banks each season, and remained there for weeks before returning home.

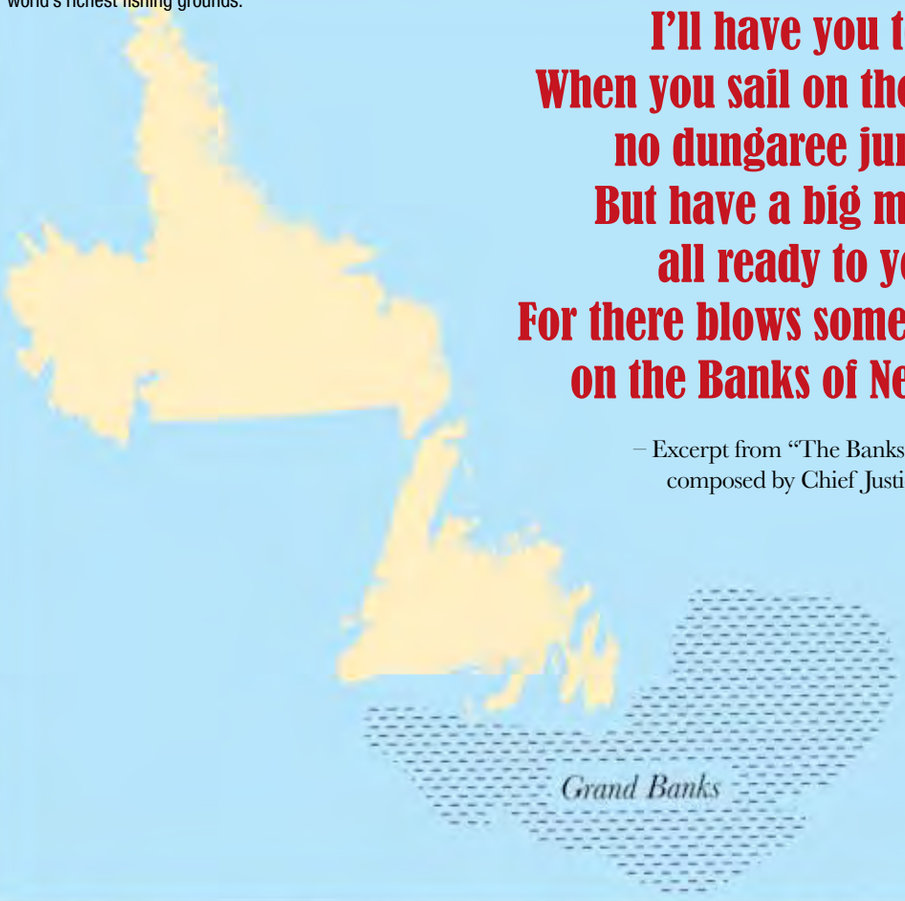
After arriving on the banks, crews anchored their boats in a favourable location and launched dories. These small boats carried two or three crew members who fished for cod using handlines, jiggers, or trawl lines. The fishers left the larger boat each morning, rowed to various fishing grounds, and returned several times throughout the day to unload their catch. They also gutted, split, and salted their own fish.

Fishers engaged in the bank fishery faced a number of dangers. Gales and rough weather threatened schooners and other banking vessels, while dory crews risked becoming lost in fog or storms. Large ocean liners also frequented the banks and could inadvertently capsize or run down dories and schooners in foggy weather. Living quarters were often cramped and any injured or ill crew members would usually have to wait until fish was brought to port to receive proper medical attention.

The bank fishery was profitable throughout the 1880s and peaked in 1889, when 4401 Newfoundland and Labrador fishers harvested more than 13 230 tons of cod. The bank fishery produced an inferior grade of fish. Already fetching lower market prices, the bank fishery was further devalued due to increased competition from Norway and Iceland. The industry declined into the 1900s and, by 1920, many communities had stopped participating in the bank fishery.

3.55 A hard day's work
Fishing for cod on the banks from a dory.

3.56 The Grand Banks
The Banks have been one of the world's richest fishing grounds.



"You bully boys of Liverpool
I'll have you to beware,
When you sail on them packet ships,
no dungaree jumpers wear;
But have a big monkey jacket
all ready to your hand,
For there blows some cold nor'westers
on the Banks of Newfoundland."

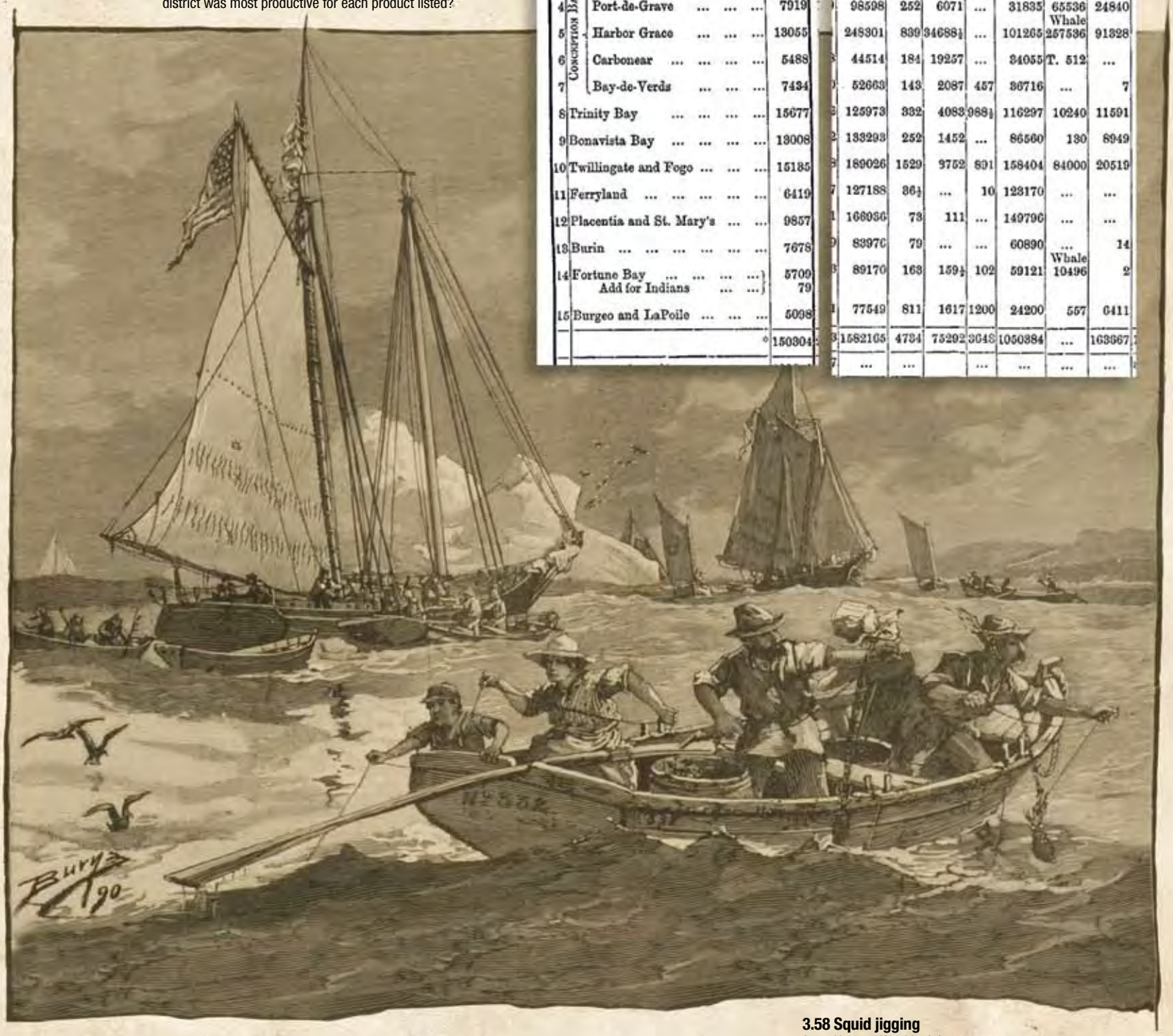
– Excerpt from "The Banks Of Newfoundland"
composed by Chief Justice Francis Forbes

Other Exports

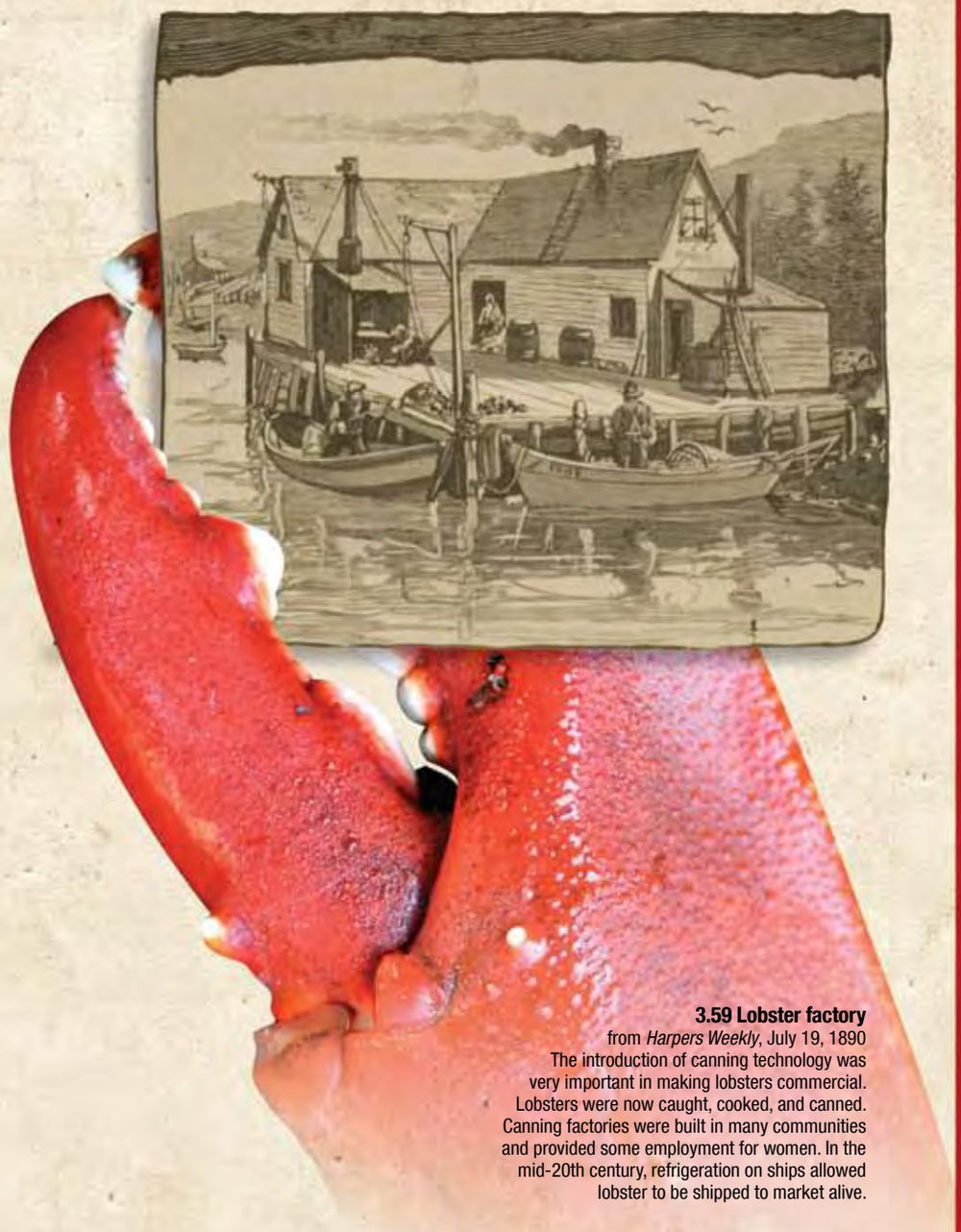
Alongside cod and seal products, the sea provided Newfoundland and Labrador with a variety of other, but much less significant, exports. These included salmon, lobster, herring, capelin, and squid – many of which found markets in France, Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. Although profitable (herring exports, for example, fetched almost $200 000 annually during the 1890s), the impacts of these products on Newfoundland and Labrador's export trade were negligible overall when compared to saltfish.

3.57 Fishing exports by district
from the Newfoundland and Labrador census of 1874. Which district was most productive for each product listed?

No.	Electoral Districts & Divisions.	No. of Inhabitants.	Fisheries. Produce. Quantity of Cod-fish cured.	Salmon caught and cured.	Herring cured.	other Fish cured.	Cod Oil—Gallons.	Seal Oil.	Seals.
			"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1	St. John's East	17811	41148	4	760	...	34757	...	...
2	St. John's West	12763	42572	17	40	...	14112	...	...
3	Conception Bay. Harbor Main	7174	61258½	20½	1214½	...	17205½	g. 1060	6
4	Conception Bay. Port-de-Grave	7919	98598	252	6071	...	31835	65536	24840
5	Conception Bay. Harbor Grace	13055	248301	839	34688½	...	101265	Whale 257536	91328
6	Conception Bay. Carbonear	5488	44514	184	19257	...	34055	T. 512	...
7	Conception Bay. Bay-de-Verds	7434	52663	143	2087	457	36716	...	7
8	Trinity Bay	15677	125973	332	4083	988½	116297	10240	11591
9	Bonavista Bay	13008	133293	252	1452	...	86560	130	8949
10	Twillingate and Fogo	15185	189026	1529	9752	691	158404	84000	20519
11	Ferryland	6419	127188	86½	...	10	123170	...	...
12	Placentia and St. Mary's	9857	166036	73	111	...	149796	...	...
13	Burin	7678	83976	79	...	...	60890	...	14
14	Fortune Bay ... ... Add for Indians	5709 79	89170	163	159½	102	59121	Whale 10496	2
15	Burgeo and LaPoile	5098	77542	811	1617	1200	24200	557	6411
		150304	1582165	4734	75292	3648	1050384	...	163967
			...	...		...	...	...	...



3.58 Squid jigging
from *Harpers Weekly*, July 19, 1890



3.59 Lobster factory
from *Harpers Weekly*, July 19, 1890
The introduction of canning technology was very important in making lobsters commercial. Lobsters were now caught, cooked, and canned. Canning factories were built in many communities and provided some employment for women. In the mid-20th century, refrigeration on ships allowed lobster to be shipped to market alive.

Questions:

1. Compare the shore fishery, banks fishery, Labrador fishery, and seal fishery in terms of (a) where each fishery happened, (b) time of year, (c) how it was done (equipment, people involved), (d) dangers involved, and (e) reasons for decline. Organize your answer in a chart.

2. During the 1800s, several technologies were introduced to the fisheries. What impact did these innovations have on the respective fisheries? Who benefited the most? Who may have been disadvantaged by these changes?

3. Overfishing is a serious matter today, however, it is not a new phenomenon. What were the consequences of overfishing in the 1800s? How did this affect the life of the fisher?

A LONG HISTORY OF TAKING FISH FROM THE SEA

The waters of Newfoundland and Labrador have been supplying fishers with their livelihood for centuries. Although cod was a mainstay of the fishery until 1992, other kinds of fisheries have developed over the years when cod stocks became low and/or as market demands changed.

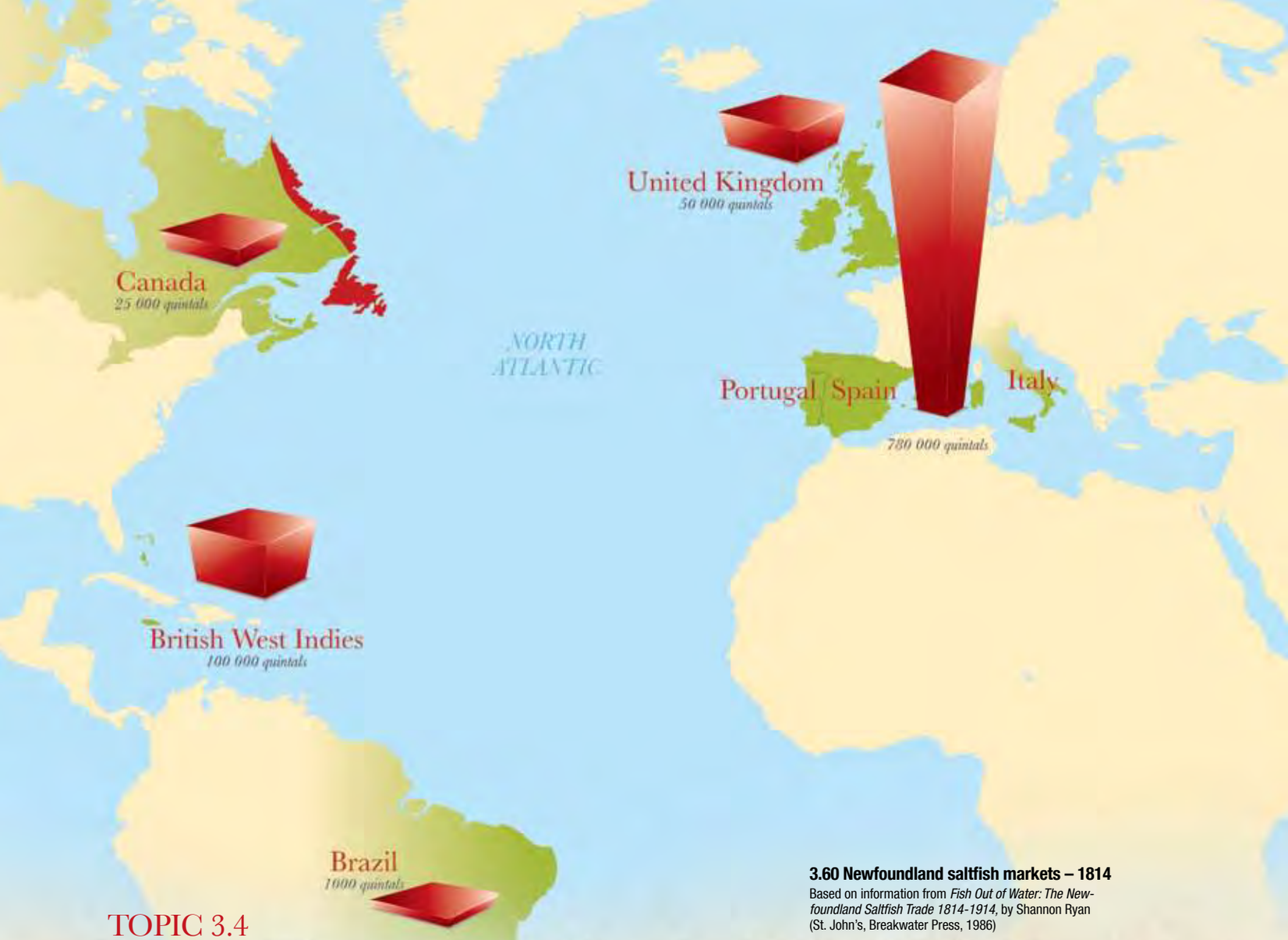
FIRST DATES OF CERTAIN COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

Species	Year
Cod	1500
Whaling	1530s*
Salmon	1705
Sealing	
Landsmen	1730s
Offshore	1793
Herring	1790s
Lobster	1870s
Squid	1930s**
Scallop	1960s
Redfish	1960s
Shark	1964***
Crab	1967
Shrimp	1970s
Aquaculture (salmon, steelhead trout, and blue mussels)	1980s

**Whaling began with the Basques, but had virtually died out by 1580. In the nineteenth century, some merchants in Newfoundland ventured into small-scale commercial whaling. Cycles of whaling continued up to 1972, when it was banned by the Government of Canada.*

*** Squid was taken long before the 1930s for use as bait.*

**** This fishery ended in 1970 when high levels of mercury were found in sharks.*



3.60 Newfoundland saltfish markets – 1814
Based on information from *Fish Out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade 1814-1914*, by Shannon Ryan (St. John's, Breakwater Press, 1986)

TOPIC 3.4

The Economics of Saltfish

To what extent do people rely on credit today?

Why were merchants considered prominent citizens in early Newfoundland communities?

Introduction

Unlike many other British possessions, Newfoundland was a significant trader in foreign marketplaces. While Canada and the British West Indies directed most of their trade back to Britain, Newfoundland sold its saltfish in places such as Southern Europe, Brazil, and the British Caribbean. The saltfish trade was big business. In 1814, the total amount of saltfish sold in overseas marketplaces was over 1 000 000 **quintals** – most of which came from Newfoundland.

Newfoundland's heavy dependence on international trade, however, made its economy vulnerable to external factors over which it had no control. If the demand for cod declined or if the price of imports increased, then the colony's economy was affected accordingly, and so was the household economy of every fishing family. Ultimately, this would lead to efforts by the government to diversify the colony's economy after 1870.

Fish for Sale

One of the keys to Newfoundland's success in the saltfish trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the ability of its fishers to produce a variety of grades of saltfish that could be sold in a wide range of markets. The island's inshore fishers produced the highest quality cure because they fished near their homes and could dry the cod almost immediately after catching it. This light-salted, hard-dried product was known as "shore" fish and often fetched the highest prices at the marketplace. Shore fish was sold in a variety of grades, as was Labrador and banks fish.

Once the fishers had caught and cured the cod, it was up to the colony's merchants to sell the product to foreign buyers. Most merchants hired agents to work directly out of the various markets in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Brazil, and the West Indies. All of these areas had a warm climate, which created a demand for a well-preserved yet affordable source of protein. Saltfish was ideal – it was inexpensive, had a long shelf life if thoroughly cured, and due to its light weight and small size it was easily transported. Sometimes the saltfish was exchanged for money and sometimes for goods, such as molasses, which could not be produced in Newfoundland and Labrador.

NEWFOUNDLAND COD.

HOW THE FISH ARE CURED AND SHIPPED.

A recent letter from St. Johns, N. F., to the Montreal *Gazettee* says: "We are now busy shipping our dried codfish for foreign markets. It is curious to note the history of a codfish from the moment when, on the hook of the fisherman, is is dragged from its native element till it disappears down the human throat on the banks of the Amazon, the Parana, the Tagus, or the Po. After a few expiring wriggles—and it is a comfort to be informed by naturalists that fish are almost insensible to pain—the cod is flung from the fisherman's

the [illegible] finished, and they are then quite ready for storing. On being conveyed to the premises of the exporting merchant, they are first 'culled,' or assorted, into four different kinds, known as 'Merchantable,' 'Madeira,' 'West India,' and 'Dun,' or broken fish. The first is the best quality; the second a grade lower; the third is intended for the stomach of negroes, and the fourth, which is incapable of keeping, is used at home. The cod sent to hot countries is packed by screw power into small casks called 'drums;' that which goes to the Medtterranean is usually exported in bulk. We ship large quantities of dried codfish to Brazil, and there is hardly an inhabited corner of that vast empire where the Newfoundland cod is not to be found, being carried [illegible] from the [illegible]

3.61 From the *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1876

MAKING THE GRADE

The fish produced in Newfoundland and Labrador was of varying quality. However, each grade satisfied a demand in the marketplace.

GRADE: Merchantable

DESCRIPTION: A thick, yellow or golden fish that was lightly-salted and not too dry (highest grade)

MARKET: Europe

GRADE: Madeira

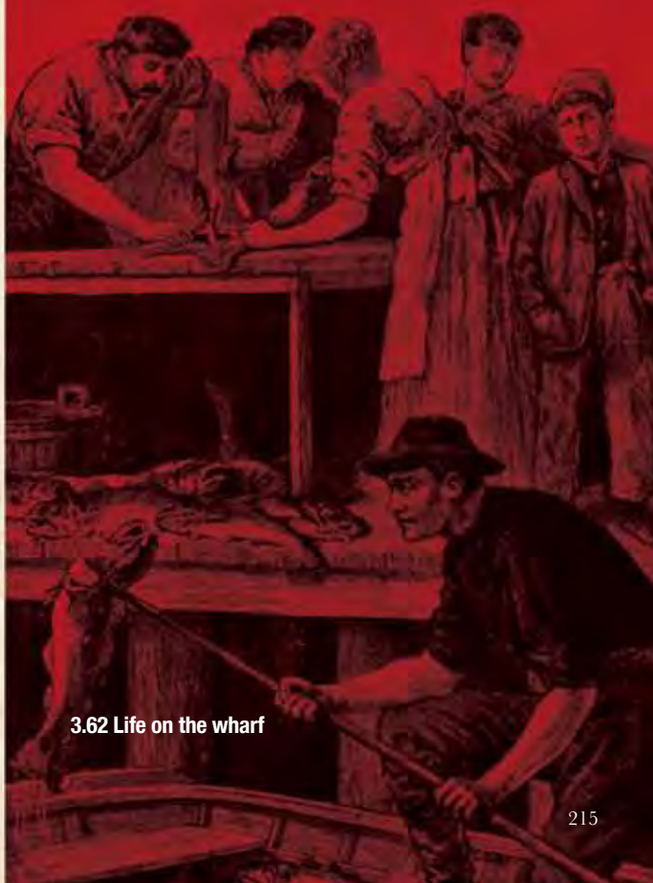
DESCRIPTION: A thinner, lesser quality of fish than Merchantable (mid-grade)

MARKET: Brazil

GRADE: West India

DESCRIPTION: Poor colour, and often broken (low-grade)

MARKET: West Indies



3.62 Life on the wharf

3.63 Curing cod
The image on the left shows drying saltfish in Newfoundland. The image on the right shows a similar process in Kirkjusandur, Iceland, c. 1898.

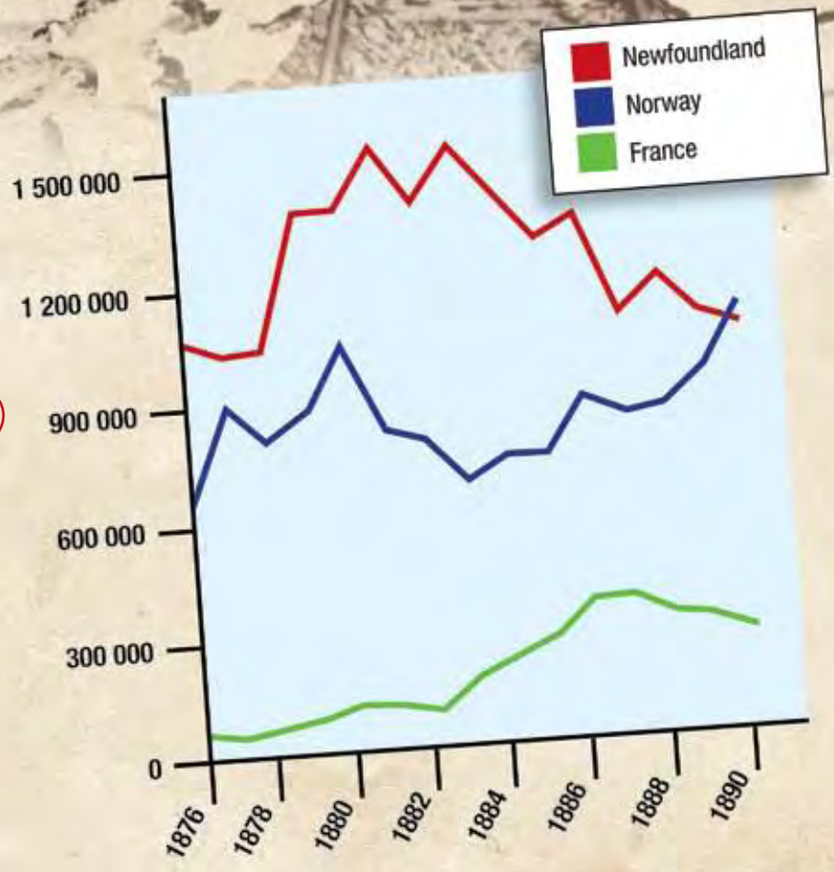
New technology was one of the reasons saltfish became less popular. By 1900, fresh meat could be frozen and shipped around the globe.

International Competition

Newfoundland and Labrador's position in world saltfish markets changed toward the end of the nineteenth century as saltfish became less important in people's diets. The saltfish trade grew more competitive as countries such as Norway and France increased their exports.

Although the colony slowly continued to increase its saltfish exports as overall world sales grew to feed the rising world population,* its share of the market dropped. By 1914, Newfoundland exports accounted for less than 30 per cent of the world sales of saltfish because of competition at market from other countries.

*Between 1500 and 1900, the world's population tripled to an estimated 1 564 000 000 people.



3.64 Saltfish exports by Newfoundland, Norway, and France, 1876-1890; cwts
Iceland and Norway started to become major competitors in the saltfish markets after 1815. As the 19th century drew to a close, Newfoundland faced increased competition from these countries in the saltfish trade.

(Based on information from *Fish Out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade 1814-1914,* by Shannon Ryan (St. John's, Breakwater Press, 1986))

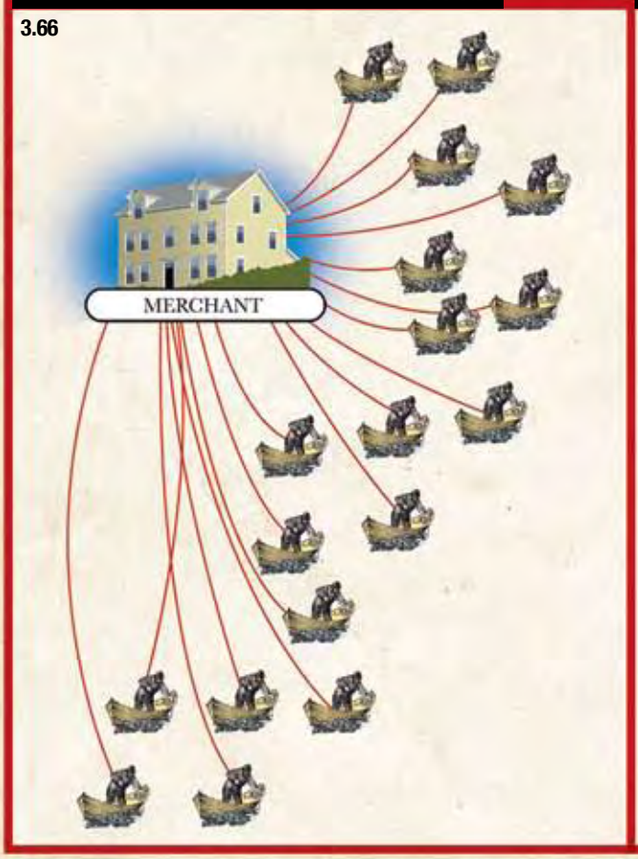
3.65 Culling and weighing saltfish
Tessier's Premises in St. John's, c. 1900

FROM DIRECT SELLING TO WHOLESALING

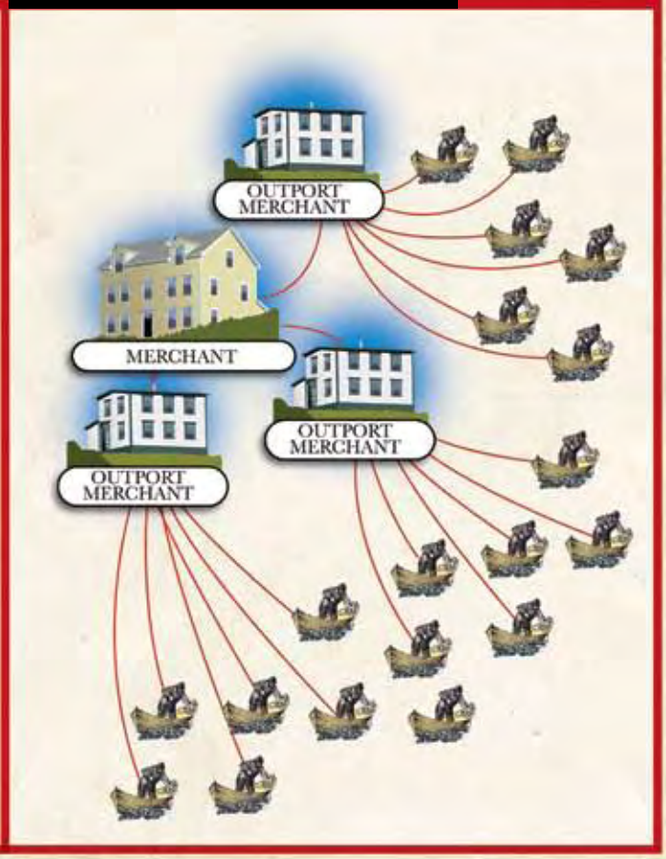
Towards the end of the 1800s, many of the larger firms made the shift from directly selling to planters to being wholesalers.

PRIOR TO THE LATE 1800s

3.66



AFTER THE LATE 1800s



The Role of Merchants

Early in the nineteenth century most merchant firms were British, but by mid-century the fish-exporting trade was dominated by St. John's firms and a few in communities such as Trinity and Bonavista. At first, these larger companies dealt directly with fishers and supplied them on credit in return for fish. Later in the century these merchants became wholesalers, supplying small outport firms, which in turn supplied the planters.

As the fishery became less profitable, many large merchants began to diversify their investments and stopped depending primarily on fish to make a profit. This created an opportunity for smaller businesses in the fishery.

Dealings between merchants and fishers in the inshore fishery were usually conducted on credit instead of with cash. Fish went to market only once or twice a year and some means had to be found to maintain the fisher in between. Few fishers could afford to outfit themselves for the fishery so merchants advanced them household and fishing supplies. In return, the merchants received the fishers' catches. Prices of fish and supplies were decided by the merchants.

The advantage of this system to the merchant was that he secured a supply of fish. The advantage to the fisher was that he could live and work, even when he could not afford to pay his way, as the merchant continued to supply him on credit. There were no cash dealings in this system; a balance in favour of a fisher was carried on the merchant's books to set against a bad year. Once firmly established, credit relations endured for years and, in some cases, for generations.

The Newfoundland credit system was frequently condemned (even by the merchants who practised it) and some would lay all the ills of the nineteenth century fishery at its door. It is said to have impoverished fishers to the benefit of merchants, saddled merchants with bad debts, produced poor-quality fish, and discouraged innovation to the detriment of the colony's economy. While there seems no doubt that the system was damaging to the industry, few fishers could have afforded to go fishing without credit.

3.67 The Ryan Premises, Bonavista
James Ryan Ltd. started in 1857 in Bayley's Cove, Bonavista and relocated to the central part of Bonavista in 1869. The Ryans made their fortune selling cured cod to Europe and the West Indies. At one time, this saltfish complex exported nearly 10 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador's entire fish production. Today the merchant premises of James Ryan in Bonavista are restored and open to the public.

The cod fishery had a long completion cycle. If all dealings were in cash, fishers would have had to wait until after their fish was cured and sold to receive payment. Until the days when fish could be sold fresh for immediate payment, the credit system remained a necessary evil.

There were a few exceptions to this. With lobster fishing and (after 1832) seal hunting, merchants did pay in cash instead of on credit.

Questions:

1. What combination of factors did fishers need to produce merchantable saltfish? Over which factors did the fishers have control?

2. Towards the end of the 1800s, many of the larger firms made the shift from directly selling to planters to being wholesalers. What were some possible advantages in this shift?

3. What reasons might account for a fisher having a bad year, and not being able to break even or earn a profit?

4. Outport merchants took many risks. Which risks could they control? Which risks could they not control?

5. Overall, was the credit system fair? Explain.

IMPORTS

Due to poor quality soil and a short growing season, agriculture in Newfoundland and Labrador produced only a small variety of produce for local markets during the nineteenth century. Likewise there was little industrialization, with few goods manufactured in the colony. As a result, residents relied heavily on the importation of food and other consumer products from foreign countries.

In the 1600s, many of these goods arrived from Britain. Prominent were such items as salt beef and pork, peas, hard bread, beer, fishing gear, cooking equipment, candles, and, to a lesser extent, cheese, butter, vinegar, liquor, and cloth.

As the resident fisheries developed in the 1700s and 1800s, Newfoundland and Labrador began to trade fish for items from other countries. By the end of the 1800s, in addition to importing goods from Britain, it was receiving products from Canada, New England, southern Europe, Brazil, and the West Indies. The bulk of these imports consisted of food items, with many agricultural imports arriving from New England. Other imports included furniture, books, feather bedding, glassware, medicines, and other merchandise.

3.68 Food Imports
***Evening Telegram* ad on imports, April 29,1882**

Just Landed,
Ex Schr. "J. A. Smith," from Barbados,
50 PUNCHEONS Choice
Retailing Molasses.
Ex "Frances," from Demerara:
161 Puncheons
Muscovado Molasses.
40 Barrels Muscovado MOLASSES.
Ex "Orleans," from New York:
300 Barrels
Extra Flour,
1200 Barrels Superfine FLOUR
376 Ditto No. 2 ditto
100 Ditto Extra Prime PORK
50 Ditto Mess ditto
Also—Ex "Marance," from Liverpool:
An Assortment of
STORE GOODS

3.69 Heart's Content, 1885

TOPIC 3.5

Lifestyle and Culture

What are the advantages and disadvantages of "winterhousing"?

In 1900, less than 50 per cent of children under age 15 attended school. Today more than 90 per cent attend. Why might this shift have occurred?

Introduction

During the migratory fishery, most occupied harbours and coves were essentially seasonal communities of transient populations. As the resident fishery developed, communities began to emerge.*

*Some would argue this was the true beginning of modern Newfoundland and Labrador society.

Life on Land and Sea

As most communities in the 1800s were based upon the shore fishery, they were located along the coast. Fishing communities, however, were not all alike. A few continued to function mainly as fishing stations, while others became regional centres with a wide range of occupations.

In some cases, even permanently settled communities lost some of their residents for parts of the year. (For example, whole families from Conception Bay would spend the summer working in the Labrador fishery.) In many areas, especially in the first half of the century, many families moved into the woods for the winter. This was called **winterhousing** and was practised in most regions outside the Avalon Peninsula. Usually the main reason for this move was to obtain wood for fuel and shelter. In some areas, winterhousing survived well into the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century inshore fishery was mainly a family fishery. Family labour was used to crew boats and cure fish, replacing the hired hands that had been used in previous centuries. When expensive cod traps, requiring much labour to operate, came into use late in the century, **kinship** ties were used to acquire and utilize them. Brothers usually fished together and fishing crews were completed by **sharemen** when family members alone could not crew boats. Those able to form trap crews usually had higher incomes than those who fished with simpler gear such as handlines.

Although the cod fishery was the main economic activity for most, it only lasted for a few months in summer (except on the south coast), so it was combined with other fisheries or land-based work during other seasons. Rural households engaged in subsistence production for home use, and sometimes for sale. Subsistence was an important part of **outport adaptation**, which had emerged in some areas at the end of the 1700s and became common during the 1800s.

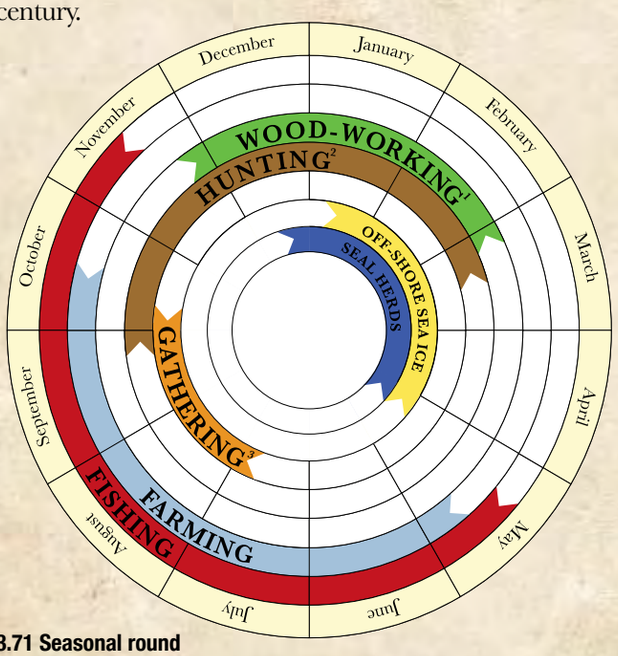
The seasonal round for most householders was built around the salt cod fishery, which ran from late May to early November. The land-based harvest of seals occurred during February and March. Subsistence farming began with the planting of crops in late May or

3.70 Farming near Quidi Vidi Lake, St. John's, c. 1900
This was an important activity for many households in 19th century Newfoundland and Labrador. Vegetable and hay gardens were common in many communities.

early June, and hoeing, weeding, and fertilizing with kelp, **fish offal**, and manure required attention during the summer.

Crops were harvested and stored in September and October. Fruit and berries were gathered in August and September to be preserved for the winter. From October to early March, game and seabirds were hunted. Early December to late February was the time to harvest timber for firewood and to repair or construct houses, outbuildings, wharves, boats, etc. During the late winter and early spring, nets, handlines, and boats had to be repaired in preparation for the fishery.

Shore fishing was combined seasonally with other fisheries – herring and lobster on the south coast, sealing and the Labrador fishery in the north. On the west coast, cod was not the main species. Rather, salmon, herring, and lobster fishing were combined with logging, trapping, and farming. Life in fishing communities, therefore, had a regional character in the nineteenth century.



3.71 Seasonal round
An example from a household in rural northeastern Newfoundland c. 1850.
1 Wood-working includes firewood, fencing materials, saw-logs, and other building materials
2 Hunting for birds, terrestrial mammals
3 Gathering of wild fruits and berries
NOTE: All boundaries are approximations and represent decreased activity

A HARD LIFE

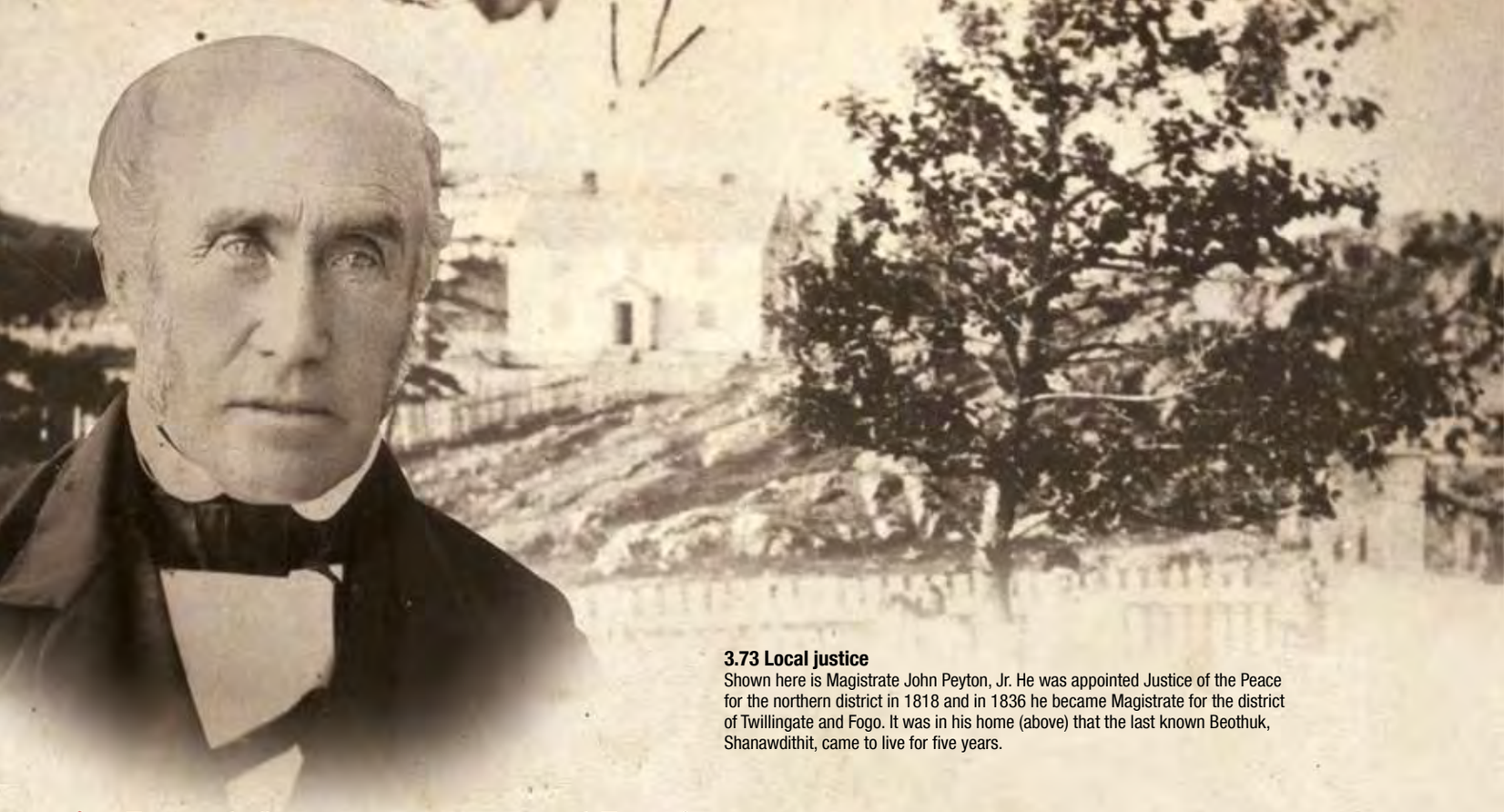
Life was very labour-intensive for fishers in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1700s and 1800s. This excerpt from William Harding's life story gives an idea of what life was like. Harding, a blacksmith by trade, shipped as a youngster from Devon in 1819 at a wage of £25 for two summers and a winter in the fishery. Although he began his life in Newfoundland and Labrador in the migratory fishery, he permanently settled in Burin where he later wrote his life story.

Upon Harding's arrival

We were soon sent from the vessel to the cook-room, with a set of Irishmen, and we soon found that we were not in old England enjoying the liberty we were used to, for we had to work from the dawn of the day to dark night about the fishery, as well as in the shop & at all calls. This we did not like! But even Sundays we had to work also, spreading fish on the Sunday morning and taking it up again in the evening.

I was not more than a fortnight in this place when I and seven men more was [sic] sent in a cod seine skiff hauling codfish. We were sent off Sunday after dinner and not to return to the cook-room until Saturday evening. No place to sleep only take a nap in the skiff, while one would be watching for a haul of fish, and only one meal of victuals cooked in twenty-four hours. If we wanted more there was bread and butter & water in the skiff. Saturday evening we went to the cook-room, put the seine on shore and spread to dry, and Sunday after dinner take it in with our week's allowance (of rum) and be off again, so we had only one night in the week to sleep in our bed. This continued six weeks and in that time we hauled six hundred quintals of codfish.

3.72 An excerpt from Harding's journal



3.73 Local justice
Shown here is Magistrate John Peyton, Jr. He was appointed Justice of the Peace for the northern district in 1818 and in 1836 he became Magistrate for the district of Twillingate and Fogo. It was in his home (above) that the last known Beothuk, Shanawdithit, came to live for five years.

Local Government and Justice

The system of using a **naval governor**, appointed by the British government, to handle matters related to civil justice continued in the latter part of the eighteenth century. To administer these affairs more effectively, the island of Newfoundland was divided into districts and zones in the mid-1760s. Nine districts were managed by **civil magistrates** and overlapped with five maritime zones looked after by naval officers commissioned as **surrogate magistrates**.

In each of the districts, a magistrate (also known as a Justice of the Peace) took **depositions**, held **petty sessions**, and organized **quarter sessions** for more serious matters of justice. At these quarter sessions, civil magistrates worked with naval surrogates.

Although governors worked to standardize the system, in reality, the operation of districts and zones varied considerably according to regional customs and available resources. In addition, although not part of the formal system, fish merchants often used their considerable influence to settle matters that directly affected them.

Improvements in this system of civil government and justice continued over the years, including the appointment of a chief justice in 1791, and the establishment of a supreme court in the following year. When Newfoundland was granted colonial status in 1825, a civil (rather than naval) governor was appointed to administer the affairs of local government.

Some historians claim this is an exaggeration. Does the evidence in this section support or refute this claim?

"The vast wealth realized by the fisheries all went to enrich other lands. None of it was spent in the improvement of Newfoundland, or in the promotion of civilization among the resident population."

– From *Newfoundland: The Oldest British Colony (1883)* by Joseph Hatton and Rev. Moses Harvey

Experiencing The Arts

Using the information in this section, create a piece of comic art that explores the lifestyle and culture of European settlers during this time period. Your work should be 6-10 frames long. Add this to your portfolio.

3.74 The Harbour Grace Affray
One of the worst incidents related to religious tensions in Newfoundland and Labrador occurred in Harbour Grace on Boxing Day (St. Stephen's Day) in 1883. "The Harbour Grace Affray," as it is now known, began when approximately 450 Protestant members of the Loyal Orange Association held their annual parade through town. During their march, they encountered a group of approximately 125 men from Riverhead, who felt the marchers were intruding on a Roman Catholic part of the town. A violent confrontation ensued. Five men were killed and 17 were injured.

Religion

As permanent settlement by Europeans became more widespread in Newfoundland and Labrador, so did the institutions of organized religion. The original distribution of religious denominations was largely determined by early immigration patterns. Thus, most English immigrants were members of the Church of England (now Anglican) although some were Methodists and Congregationalists (now United Church) and most Irish immigrants were Roman Catholics. Lowland Scots settling in St. John's were mostly Presbyterians, but Highland Scots who moved to the Codroy Valley from Cape Breton were typically Roman Catholics. Most French settlers were also Roman Catholic.

Some changes to this distribution pattern occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of the efforts of some denominations to gain converts. For instance, Methodist preachers sent as missionaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had some success in converting many of the English settlers to their teachings. Later, the Salvation Army and Pentecostal movements were able to establish strong congregations through conversions mainly among the Protestant denominations. Other smaller religious groups and denominations also arrived later – such as Seventh-Day Adventism, which was introduced to Newfoundland in 1893.

3.75 Congregational Church, St. John's, prior to 1906

Unfortunately, as in many parts of British North America, the growth of permanent settlement also brought with it some of the religious tensions and ethnic prejudices that immigrants had experienced in their European homelands. As one historian noted: "Old jealousies and distrusts were revived. The memory of ancient wrongs and grievances awoke. Each dreaded the political ascendancy of the other, and strove to gain the controlling power." In addition, as churches began to take responsibility for the education of their members, people socialized almost entirely within their denomination. Because of this, there has been a close association between religion and politics, education, and ethnicity in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Health

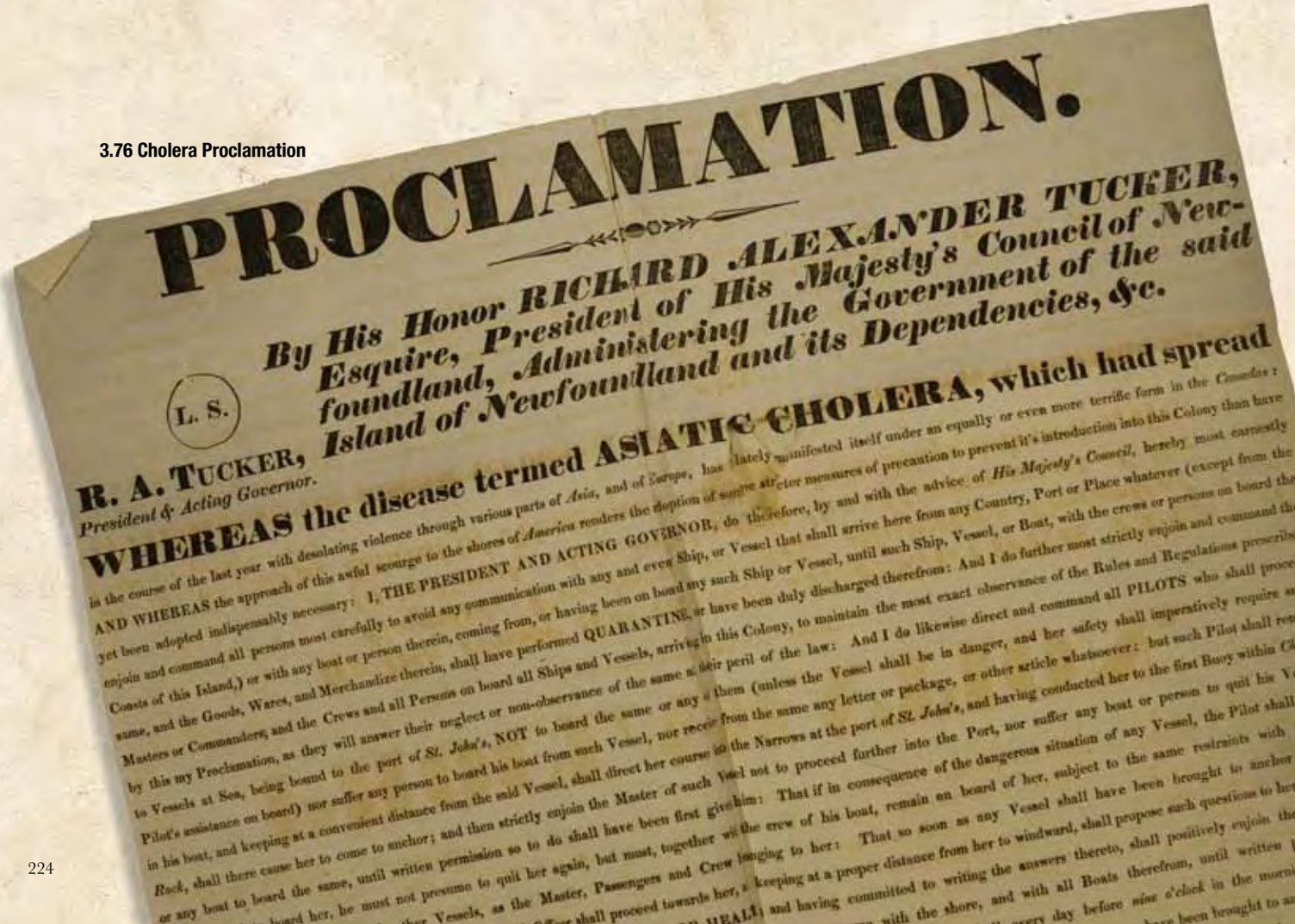
Even with an increase of permanent settlement, at the end of the eighteenth century there were few social services for residents. Health care services were non-existent for most – although there were naval surgeons aboard British military vessels patrolling the fishery, who sometimes treated local residents. There were also a few military infirmaries in St. John's, which treated civilian patients when their resources allowed. In Northern Labrador, Moravian missionaries provided some health-care services, but could only reach a fraction of the region's scattered population. Resident doctors were rare, especially outside St. John's, and physicians who did service outport communities had to travel long distances by snowshoe, horseback, or boat to examine patients who often could not afford to pay for treatment.

The first civilian hospital in Newfoundland and Labrador was the Riverhead Hospital established in St. John's in 1814. This was mainly thanks to a widespread public movement for better health care, led by Scottish reformer William Carson. Although the government was involved in the construction of the new hospital, the facility ran largely on public donations and struggled to provide adequate care because of the huge demands placed on it. Three more civilian hospitals were opened in St. John's by the end of the nineteenth century but, for the most part, the rest of the colony remained without health facilities and residents were left to depend on folk medicine and the skills of midwives.*

*Wilfred Grenfell opened a hospital in Battle Harbour in 1893.

3.77 Caring for the sick, c. 1880
The General Hospital served as a military institution until 1870, when Britain transferred its garrison from St. John's to Halifax. The facility reopened a year later as the Forest Road Hospital and became the General Hospital in 1880.

3.76 Cholera Proclamation



PROCLAMATION.

By His Honor RICHARD ALEXANDER TUCKER, Esquire, President of His Majesty's Council of Newfoundland, Administering the Government of the said Island of Newfoundland and its Dependencies, &c.

L. S.

R. A. TUCKER,
President & Acting Governor.

WHEREAS the disease termed ASIATIC CHOLERA, which had spread in the course of the last year with desolating violence through various parts of *Asia*, and of Europe, has lately manifested itself under an equally or even more terrific form in the Country of *America* renders the adoption of some stricter measures of precaution to prevent it's introduction into this Colony than have yet been adopted indispensably necessary: I, THE PRESIDENT AND ACTING GOVERNOR, do therefore, by and with the advice of *His Majesty's Council*, hereby most earnestly enjoin and command all persons most carefully to avoid any communication with any and every Ship, or Vessel that shall arrive here from any Country, Port or Place whatever (except from the Coasts of this Island,) or with any boat or person therein, coming from, or having been on board any such Ship or Vessel, until such Ship, Vessel, or Boat, with the crews or persons on board the same, and the Goods, Wares, and Merchandize therein, shall have performed QUARANTINE, or have been duly discharged therefrom: And I do further most strictly enjoin and command the Masters or Commanders, and the Crews and all Persons on board all Ships and Vessels, arriving in this Colony, to maintain the most exact observance of the Rules and Regulations prescribed by this my Proclamation, as they will answer their neglect or non-observance of the same at their peril of the law: And I do likewise direct and command all PILOTS who shall proceed to Vessels at Sea, being bound to the port of *St. John's*, NOT to board the same or any of them (unless the Vessel shall be in danger, and her safety shall imperatively require such Pilot's assistance on board) nor suffer any person to board his boat from such Vessel, nor receive from the same any letter or package, or other article whatsoever: but such Pilot shall remain in his boat, and keeping at a convenient distance from the said Vessel, shall direct her course to the Narrows at the port of *St. John's*, and having conducted her to the first Buoy within *Chain-Rock*, shall there cause her to come to anchor; and then strictly enjoin the Master of such Vessel not to proceed further into the Port, nor suffer any boat or person to quit his Vessel, or any boat to board the same, until written permission so to do shall have been first given him: That if in consequence of the dangerous situation of any Vessel, the Pilot shall have been brought to anchor at the request of the Master, Passengers and Crew belonging to her: That so soon as any Vessel shall have been brought to anchor at the Vessels, as the Master, Passengers and Crew belonging to her, shall propose such questions to her Master shall proceed towards her, keeping at a proper distance from her to windward, shall positively enjoin the Master HEALTH, and having committed to writing the answers thereto, shall positively enjoin the Master with the shore, and with all Boats therefrom, until written permission every day before nine o'clock in the morning, repair been brought to anchor at the they may

3.78 Typical one-room school
Built around 1820, this school house in Mosquito (now Bristol's Hope) is an example of typical wooden schools in outport communities in the 1800s. It still stands as a heritage structure.

August	1	2	4	11	12	13	14	15
1869	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	
English Lessons.								
Spelling.								
Scriptural Studies.								
History.								
Catechism.								
Poetry.								
Chronology.								
Mythology.								
Geog. & Astron.								
English Exercises								
Dictation.								
English Reading.								
Parsing.								
English Grammar.								
Sciences.								
Music.								
Pianoforte.								
French Lessons.								
French Exercises.								
French Reading & Translation.								
French Grammar.								
Writing.								
Arithmetic.								
Work.								
Neatness.								
Punctuality.								
General Good Behaviour.								

No. Good.
No. Bad.
REMARK.

3.79 Making the grade
A few private schools existed in the mid-1800s, such as Jersey Lodge, an "Establishment for Young Ladies" in St. John's. As indicated in this 1869 grade boook from Jersey Lodge, the curriculum was tailored for girls from the upper class, who did not need to learn the same kind of practical skills that children in working class families learned at home.

Education

Formal education was slow to develop in Newfoundland and Labrador. During the time of migration and settlement – the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – the typical community was mainly pragmatic in its values and outlooks. The main objective for every family was to make a living, mostly in the fishery. Thus, the primary goals of instruction were to train boys as fishers and to teach girls practical skills that contributed directly to household production.

Although merchants and traders did need some formal education to be successful, most did not see the necessity or desirability of schools for the working population. Some religious groups, however, did put a premium value on literacy as a means to enhance public worship and to read the Bible. The first school on the island of Newfoundland was established in Bonavista in 1726 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Other schools followed through the work of various societies and churches, such as the Newfoundland School Society, which opened a school in St. John's in 1823, and the Benevolent Irish Society, which opened the Orphan Asylum School in St. John's in 1827. A few privately operated schools, or academies, run by individuals were also established. Although many of these early schools were influenced by church involvement, they were officially non-denominational as they were open to all.

In 1836, four years after representative government was established in Newfoundland, the first Education Act was passed. The Committee appointed to review education in the colony recommended that "since the voluntary system works advantageously, assistance be given by the legislature to the several societies who direct the gratuitous education of the poor classes …" To do this, the act created school boards to administer grants to existing schools. For the most part, churches were in favour of continuing to be responsible for the education of their members. It gave them strong control over their congregations and over what values were imparted to children.

The Education Act of 1843 stipulated that educational grants be divided equally between Protestants and Catholics, a first step towards a denominational education system. In 1874, an act was passed to make the educational system completely denominational, and three government inspectors were appointed, one each for Roman Catholic, Church of England, and Methodist schools. Despite these advances in the education system, there were still many children in Newfoundland that did not have access to formal schooling or were not able to go because they needed to work with the family. In 1900, less than 50%* of children between the ages of five and fifteen were attending elementary school.

*One reason for this was that the educational system was not well integrated with the economic system. In Denmark, for instance, schools teaching agricultural skills were established very early on. However, Newfoundland and Labrador did not get a fisheries college until 1964.

3.80 Leisure and reflection
A view of the seven islands in the harbour of Placentia

Social Class

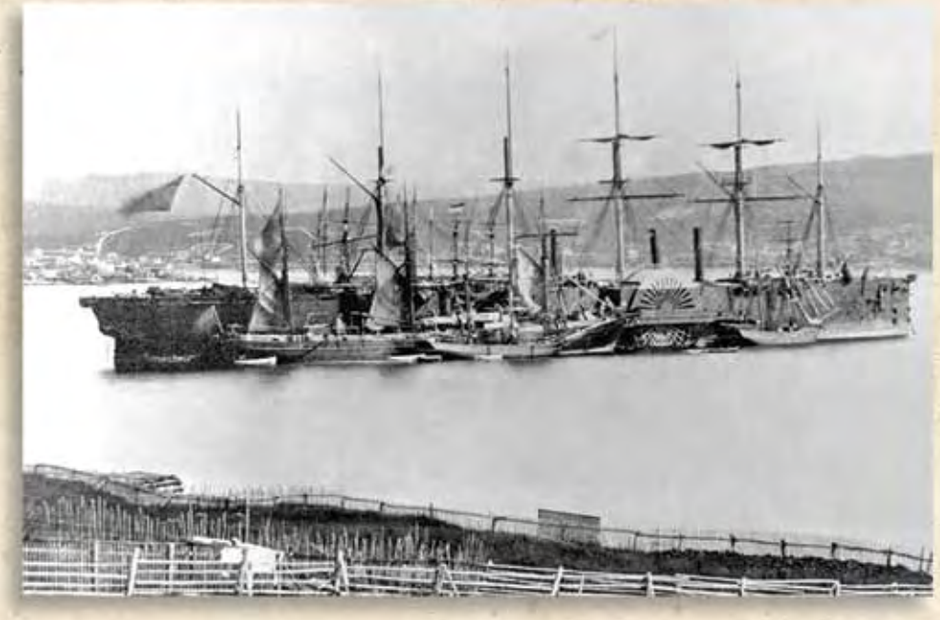
In the early 1800s there were two main classes – wealthy merchants and planters, and poor fishers. However, a rural middle class emerged towards the end of the century. Fishers who utilized cod traps to obtain higher catches began to accumulate capital. Likewise, local men who found employment in the civil service became members of the middle class. Fishers who owned little gear, as well as sharemen, who owned none, formed the lower class.

Communication and Culture

There are signs that distinctive regional subcultures emerged during the nineteenth century in some areas, incorporating elements from countries of origin and distinctly local elements. Language is a good example; sometimes communities just a few kilometres apart had distinctive dialects and different terms for the same objects. Other differences between communities in the same region can be explained due to variation in local economies.

Part of the reason for this phenomenon was the isolation that most outport residents experienced. While there were often paths between communities, there were no roads across the interiors of Newfoundland and Labrador, and most communities could only be reached by boat. As a

3.81 Family life in the 1800s
Lifestyles of families varied based on class.



3.82 SS *Great Eastern* at Heart's Content, July 1866
The SS *Great Eastern* was the world's largest ship when it was launched it 1858. This ship brought the first transatlantic cable from Ireland to Heart's Content in 1866.

consequence, there was little opportunity for extensive interaction between communities. The first postal service in Newfoundland and Labrador began in 1805 when the Governor established a postmaster in St. John's to handle letters to and from London. However, mail service to the rest of the island had to wait until the Colony took over the operation of the post office in 1851 and began to subsidize **packet boats** to deliver mail along the coast.

Telegraph in Newfoundland did not become operational until 1852 when lines were established between St. John's and Trepassey and St. John's and Carbonear. Additional lines were laid in 1867 to Old Perlican, Placentia, and Heart's Content – the latter being the site of the first transatlantic cable. More lines were built in the 1870s and 1880s, but it wasn't until the railway telegraph lines were built in the 1890s that the western and northern coasts received telegraph service.

Some international news began to reach St. John's when Newfoundland and Labrador's first newspaper, *The Royal Gazette*, began as a weekly publication in 1807. However, local news was subject to government scrutiny before publication to ensure the paper did not print anything that "may tend to disturb the peace of His Majesty's subjects." The first daily newspaper, *The Evening Telegram*, started in St. John's in 1879. Harbour Grace, Carbonear, and Twillingate also had newspapers by the end of the 1800s.

As parts of Newfoundland and Labrador slowly became more connected, regional subcultures began to develop into a "national culture." One indication that Newfoundlanders were beginning to think of themselves as a distinct group came with the creation of the Natives' Society in St. John's in 1836. The goal of this society was to advance the careers and interests of "native-born Newfoundlanders." The society even developed its own flag – an early symbol of identity for Newfoundlanders.

3.83 Locals only
The Natives' Society did not last long; it was, however, an expression of the tension that existed between Newfoundland-born and those born elsewhere.

Questions:

1. "The resident fisher's life was a hard life."
   a. What evidence in the text supports this statement?
   b. Compared to the life of a migratory fisher, was the resident fisher's life any easier?
2. Examine the visuals in fig. 3.80 and 3.81. Speculate as to which social class is represented in each visual. What evidence did you use to determine this?
3. What aspects of present-day Newfoundland and Labrador culture and identity have their roots in this time period?