TOPIC 5.7

Aboriginal Lifestyles

Should Aboriginal languages be a mandatory part of the provincial curriculum?

Why is it important for traditional Aboriginal lifestyles to be maintained by younger generations?

5.96 An unidentified group of Inuit visiting a store in the Voisey's Bay area, pre-1960

5.97 Making do with whatever materials are available
This picture from the 1930s shows a woman standing next to a shed made from half a fishing skiff.

Introduction

The Great Depression and worldwide drop in fur prices in the 1930s affected all Aboriginal groups, as it did many other Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. A further challenge to living a traditional lifestyle was the reduction in traditional trapping and hunting grounds because of new forestry and other economic development – although these sometimes did offer alternative forms of employment. In particular, the building of the military base at Goose Bay drew many members from Labrador Aboriginal groups away from their traditional communities to a larger urban centre.

Inuit

When the Moravians sold their stores to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1926 because of financial difficulties, life for Inuit of Labrador changed. The Hudson's Bay Company was involved mainly in the fur trade. The company provided Inuit with the necessary food and ammunition to hunt, and encouraged Inuit to abandon or decrease many of their other activities, including sealing and fishing, in order to trade fur year-round for credit at company stores.

With the advent of the Great Depression in the 1930s, dependence on the fur trade and on Hudson's Bay Company stores for manufactured goods and imported foods undermined the Inuit subsistence economy and made them more vulnerable to outside forces over which they had no control. When the price of fur dropped during the Great Depression, many Inuit families fell into poverty. The company suggested a return to sealing rather than trapping furs, but nets used for sealing had been neglected, and the rawhide had rotted.

An additional problem was increased health issues among Inuit, arising from changes in diet and lifestyle. In 1932, the Hudson's Bay Company ended credit advances and conducted an entirely cash and barter business. The only way some Inuit could earn money to buy supplies was to sell wood to the Hudson's Bay Company store. By 1936, diseases such as scurvy and beriberi became more prevalent. There was also an increase in the number of tuberculosis cases. The only form of government assistance for Inuit was small relief payments that were distributed by the Newfoundland Ranger Force.

Eventually, lower worldwide prices for furs led the Hudson's Bay Company to withdraw from northern Labrador in the 1940s. Government then took over the posts and promoted a return to the diversified Inuit economy by accepting goods other than furs.

5.98 Inuit boys in Makkovik, c. 1930

However, other outside factors arose to influence the way of life for Inuit living in Labrador. The construction of the large military base at Goose Bay during the Second World War, and the construction of smaller radar bases along the coast, provided cash for some Inuit. This was the first time many Inuit were able to purchase goods using a cash system. This increase in construction led to some Inuit travelling to the Lake Melville area for work. Since they were not allowed to live close to the base, many began to set up their houses in Happy Valley.* As well, contact with other groups, especially the Canadian and American military personnel, introduced Inuit to a lifestyle that was very different from the traditional lifestyle to which they were accustomed.

*The two settlements of Happy Valley and Goose Bay were amalgamated into a single town, Happy Valley–Goose Bay, in 1974.

5.99 A different lifestyle
The construction of the Goose Bay military base in 1941 attracted many Inuit, Innu, and Metis workers to the area. This move meant several lifestyle changes for these workers and their families. (above) Locals wait to view a movie on the Canadian part of the base. (right) The Royal Canadian Air Force section of Goose Air Base, c. 1943.

TRADITIONAL INUIT LIFESTYLE

Inuit lifestyle continued in much the same way for hundreds of years. But the arrival of more people in Labrador and the construction of mega-projects made it more difficult for Inuit to continue this subsistence living as many of the habitats of their traditional hunting grounds were destroyed or changed. The following is a brief look at the traditional Inuit annual cycle. As you read, consider how external forces would have brought changes to this lifestyle from the 1930s to 1949.

Early autumn to mid-December: Inuit went inland to hunt caribou. About the middle of October they moved to their winter camps, where they repaired and entered semi-permanent winter houses. The exact locations of these camps have been determined by archaeological surveys. All of these sites were ideally situated for intercepting the herds of harp seals.

From mid-December to March: Inuit hunted seals found out on the sinâ or edge of the sea ice. Inuit did not hoard. When they were hungry they would send out a Kamutik to their inland areas to retrieve the caribou meat that had been cached during the autumn. Fish that had been cached would also be retrieved, as needed.

In late winter (March to April): Hunting productivity was low. Inuit fished through the ice to augment their food resources.

In spring (May to June): Winter snowhouses were abandoned in favour of tents. Kajak hunting occurred – mostly for bearded seals until the arrival of the harp seals. It was also common to hunt eider ducks and collect their eggs. This was also the season when beluga whales were hunted.

Summer (July to August): Inuit would leave their spring camps to hunt for sea mammals and to fish for Atlantic salmon; in late summer they would fish for char.

Mid-August to mid-October: Inuit would obtain caribou hides for the coming winter to make warm winter clothing and bedding.

Innu

As with other groups in Labrador, Innu were affected by the Great Depression and the worldwide drop in fur prices in the 1930s. At the same time, there was a decline in the caribou population brought about by increased logging on Innu traditional grounds. For example, during the 1930s and 1940s the Quebec North Shore Paper Company gained control of more and more land. By 1950, it controlled approximately 15 500 square kilometres (6000 square miles) of timber land on or near traditional hunting areas. Further interference in Innu hunting patterns occurred in the mid-1930s, when hunting regulations were established by the Newfoundland government and enforced by Newfoundland Rangers – although Innu had been hunting for hundreds of years guided by their own respect for animals.

Innu also experienced a decline in the stock of fur-bearing animals as Metis trappers began using Innu hunting grounds, too. A Finnish geographer of the time, Väinö Tanner, estimated that in 1939 there were 15 000 traps on the Naskaupi and Hamilton River systems. Unable to obtain enough furs and caribou to adequately provide for their families, many Innu were left with no choice but to look for assistance from the government. Increased reliance on government relief, however, made it difficult for Innu to maintain a migratory lifestyle. Instead of travelling the great distances they had traditionally, many Innu remained close to settlements where missionaries and government representatives worked.

The Innu population was ministered to by the Catholic Church, at first by Oblates* from Canada, then in the 1920s by the Diocese of Harbour Grace in Newfoundland. Father Edward O'Brien visited from the 1920s to 1945 and, in 1927, he extended his mission to Old Davis Inlet. Father O'Brien was instrumental in persuading the Innu to move to Sheshatshiu as more and more non-Innu were settling on traditional Innu territory. He converted the abandoned Revillons Frères trading post there into a church and baptized

For instance, when a caribou was skinned, nothing was wasted, or left lying around. People followed the animals; they never stayed in one place for a long time, so the animals were not depleted.

*An "Oblate" is a lay person dedicated to religious work or the religious life.

5.100 "Pokue and family" and "Innu children"
These pictures of an Innu family and Innu children were taken pre-1960 when they visited a storekeeper in the Voisey's Bay area.

5.101 Innu making a birch bark canoe, c. 1930s

and married many Innu. Father O'Brien often sought the help of the government for Innu during his 26 years in Labrador, championing their cause and even intervening with the HBC on their behalf. He kept valuable records, took numerous photographs (See fig. 5.102 as an example), and took the first census of Innu. Like others, however, Father O'Brien would not allow Innu to practise their own rituals, and Innu religion was only practised when Innu returned to the bush.

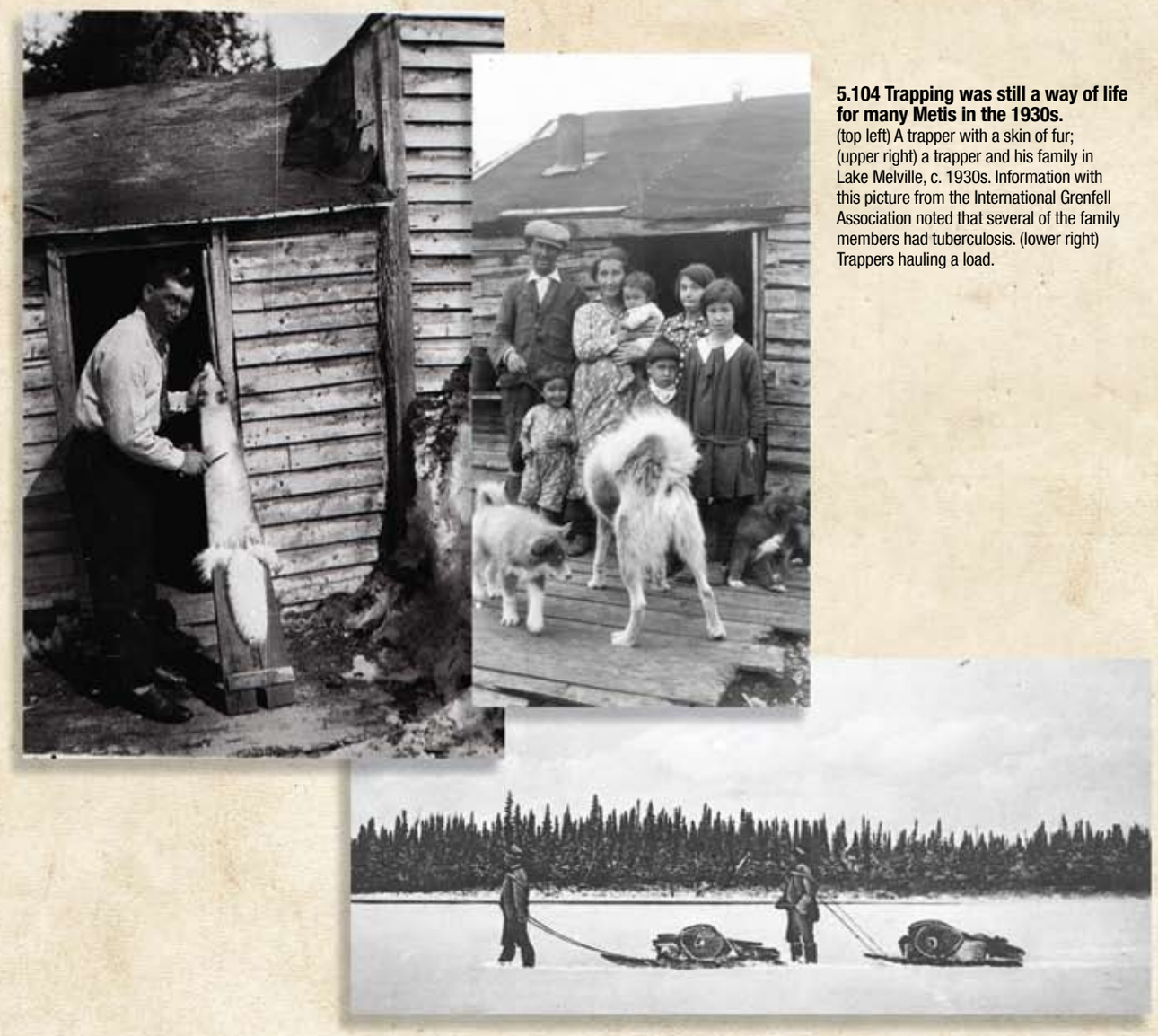
5.102 A husband and wife from the North West River area, c. 1930
This picture was taken by Father Edward O'Brien.

5.103 Women and children in a camp at North West River

WOMEN IN INNU SOCIETY

Each person in Innu society had an important role. Decisions were made by both men and women. A problem was discussed and a decision was made by all. When the men were gone hunting or trapping, elderly women in the camp made the decisions. Husbands respected their wives and acknowledged the work they did. The following are some of the typical chores an Innu woman may have traditionally done in a day:

- **Make a fire to heat water for washing**
- **Cook for the children**
- **Clean dishes**
- **Clean blankets and tent**
- **If caribou had been caught, clean the meat and prepare it for smoking or drying**
- **Get boughs for floor of the tent**
- **Spend time outside with the children, perhaps on a hike to go partridge hunting or berry picking**
- **Sew**
- **Make bread**
- **Prepare the main evening meal for the hunters' return**
- **Put the children to bed – children were often told bedtime stories about animals and the traditional lifestyle**
- **Sometimes wives would hunt with their husbands. When they did this, the oldest daughter would be in charge of the family.**



5.104 Trapping was still a way of life for many Metis in the 1930s. (top left) A trapper with a skin of fur; (upper right) a trapper and his family in Lake Melville, c. 1930s. Information with this picture from the International Grenfell Association noted that several of the family members had tuberculosis. (lower right) Trappers hauling a load.

Metis

Metis life continued to be one of hunting and gathering, augmented by commercial trapping and fishing. After the 1929 stock market crash, the price of fish dropped dramatically. Although trapping was affected, it provided a modest living for most Metis.

In Upper Lake Melville the Hudson's Bay Company was given competition by the Revillon Brothers and by trapper-trader John Groves. It was also given competition by the Fequets in Sandwich Bay. In Aboriginal tradition, Labrador Metis had their own social support system separate from government. The person who inherited a trap line gave 30 per cent of his gross earnings on the trap line to the family of the previous owner.

During the Second World War, the demand for fur declined, but a major air base was constructed at Goose Bay in Central Labrador and many people from all parts of Labrador came to work on the base. Although many continued commercial trapping and fishing, this marked the beginning of the end for a subsistence way of life for Metis, as people moved to a more reliable cash economy.

From the 1920s, increased missionary activity added a new dimension to life for Metis. The International Grenfell Association established a hospital and a residential school in North West River, Cartwright, and Battle Harbour regions. People not only experienced better health care, but the children were being educated to face the challenges of a changing society. During this time, some people gave up commercial trapping and fishing to work for the mission.

An important missionary was Methodist Reverend Dr. Lester Burry. He did much to alleviate the loneliness and isolation experienced by trappers on their trap lines. From September to Christmas, and sometimes until March, trappers were alone on their trap lines deep in the heart of Labrador. The only way to send or receive a message from home was to leave a note at the end of a trail and hope that someone would come along and bring the note to the end of the next trapper's trap line. This would occur all the way down "the river" to his family.

In 1937 Dr. Burry built four radios and distributed them

5.105 Hauling up a boat in Table Bay in the early 1940s

5.106 Rev. Lester Burry

to trappers on the trap line. On November 20, 1937 he made his first broadcast. Trappers could now receive news from home, weather forecasts, and Sunday services.

Dr. Burry also introduced democracy to Labrador. Until the Confederation debates, the people of Labrador did not have the right to participate in elections and had no representative in any Government House of Assembly, although they paid taxes to Newfoundland. Dr. Burry* was the first Labrador representative in government. He encouraged Labrador people to support confederation. The Labrador vote helped ensure Newfoundland's confederation with Canada, which not only dramatically changed the life of people in Labrador, but on the island of Newfoundland, as well.

*Rev. Burry was the Labrador representative to the National Convention and one of the "Ottawa Delegation" that went to discuss the possibility of Confederation with Canada.

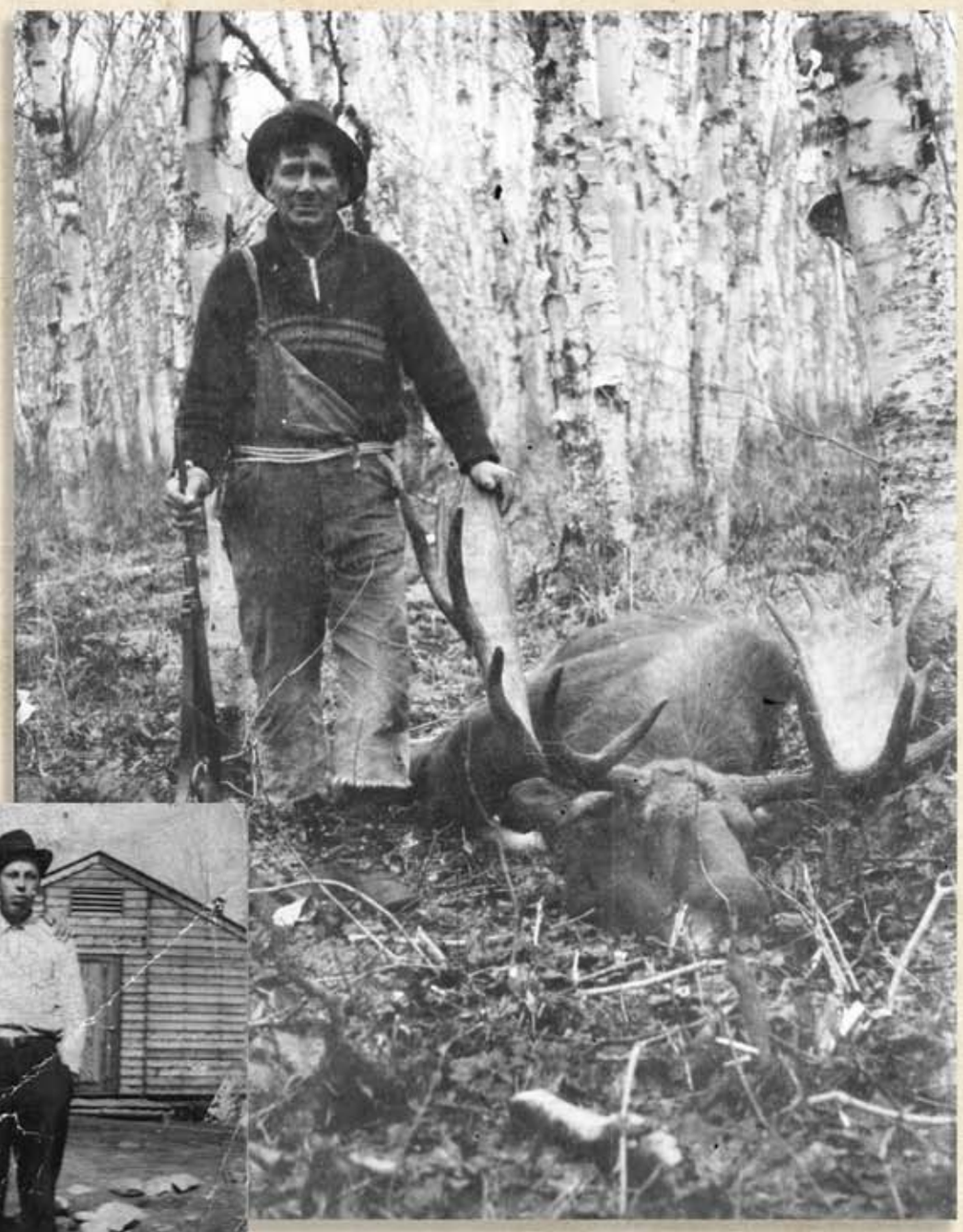
A NEW LIFE IN HAPPY VALLEY AND GOOSE BAY

In the following excerpts from *Woman of Labrador* (1973), Elizabeth Goudie shares some of her memories of the changes introduced to her life by the building of the base at Goose Bay.

"1939 brought the old life of Labrador to a close. The war was on then and in 1940 people began to talk about an air base being built in Goose Bay … Everyone was so happy. There was going to be work for our men. We were going to have a chance to earn a steady income."

"[At first] … we still lived on in Mud Lake. Jim worked in summer and trapped in winter. We were bothered with heavy colds and flu and a lot of us got quite sick. The doctor said it was because of the new people that had moved into Labrador … There were a few of our old people who died of heavy colds and pneumonia when the base first came to Goose Bay."

"The next year, 1944, we moved to the Valley. I had lived 25 years in Mud Lake. I was sorry to move because I had gardens in Mud Lake … We came in August and had to cut all the birches and spruces off the bank to put down our tent camp. Although my husband was working every day, he got some second-hand lumber and whatever else he could get to build a little shack for the winter. We camped from August until October when we moved into the house. It was pretty small, about 18 by 20 feet …"



5.107 A Mi'kmaw hunting guide near Gander River, c. 1930s

5.108 Two young men from Conne River

Mi'kmaq

As for many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the 1930s brought hard times to Mi'kmaq. In addition to facing the near extinction of caribou in their traditional hunting lands, they too had to deal with the effects of the Great Depression and the worldwide drop in fur prices. By 1945 there were no full-time trappers left in Conne River (Miawpukek), the largest Mi'kmaw community.

Some Mi'kmaq were able to find work as loggers or as guides for hunters in the 1930s. This represented one of the few sources of cash for the community. The Second World War brought a measure of improvement for some Mi'kmaq, as it did for many other Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and several Mik'maq joined the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit as loggers. Also Bowaters began pulpwood operations in the Conne River area in the early 1940s and this provided work for some. However, hunting, fishing, and gathering berries remained a necessary part of most peoples' lives into the 1970s.

In an article in *The Coaster*, Conne River resident John Nicholas Jeddore shared some memories of his life in that community during the 1930s and 1940s:

5.109 John Nicholas Jeddore was born in Conne River in 1922.

"I finished school when I was eight years old. From that point on – 1930 to 1941 – I used to go hunting and trapping each year with my father … We would start hunting caribou in late September and probably kill seven or eight for the fall and winter. We would dry the meat, which would be a good part of our winter's food supply. It would get as mouldy as hell at times, but it was still good to eat.

"After the caribou hunt was over the prime 'furring time' would be starting and we would spend the rest of the fall and winter trapping beaver and otter. We would live in wigwams in the country while on our trips. We'd spend about seven days in each wigwam until we came back to the main wigwam again. This was my life until I went overseas [as a member of the British Forestry Unit in Scotland] in 1941.

[Back in Conne River after the war …] The bottom had fallen out of the trapping industry by 1945, so I went to work for Bowater's cutting pulpwood – a job I held until 1954."

By the late 1940s, Mi'kmaq lived in 11 small communities scattered across the southern, western, and northern parts of the island of Newfoundland. However, in 1946 when Newfoundland was discussing confederation with Canada, the Director of Indian Affairs erroneously reported that there were no Aboriginal people on the island. Again when confederation was settled, Premier Joey Smallwood did not list the Mi'kmaq as Aboriginals. It would be several more decades before any Mi'kmaq would receive government recognition.

5.110 Mi'kmaw star
Chief Jasen S. Benwah of the Benoit First Nation notes this symbol "is a revision of the seven-pointed star that has been used for centuries as the symbol for the sun, but it also represents the original seven districts of the Mi'kmaq Nation which later became eight districts with the addition of Taqamkuk (Newfoundland). There is a similar one that is the hieroglyph for a star. It has many variations and is one of the petroglyphs that can be traced back over 500 years in Bedford, Nova Scotia."

Questions:

1. Use a graphic organizer to identify the problems faced by Aboriginal groups in Newfoundland and Labrador during this time period. Which was the most significant problem? Explain.
2. What alternative forms of employment (unrelated to traditional lifestyle) were available to Aboriginal people?

TOPIC 5.8

The National Convention

A referendum is a direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to accept or reject a particular proposal. What types of issues would prompt a government to hold a referendum?

Why are some people apathetic towards politics?

WEATHER FORECAST

The Daily News

Newfoundland's Only Morning Newspaper

ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1945

IT WILL PAY YOU to hold on to your War Savings Certificates until FULL MATURITY.

Be Wise—
GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR INVESTMENT!

Newfoundlanders To Vote On Future Government

Election Representatives To National Convention Will Probably Be Held Early June

5.111 Excerpt from *The Daily News*, Dec. 12, 1945

5.112 Governor Gordon MacDonald at the formal opening of the National Convention, Sept. 11, 1946, Colonial Building, St. John's.

Introduction

Newfoundland and Labrador's 1933 agreement with Britain stated, in effect, that the Commission of Government would stay in office until the country was once again financially self-supporting and a request was made for the return of responsible government. However, the Commission of Government remained in power for 15 years – much longer than most people had expected. This was due to the continuing effects of the Great Depression on Newfoundland's economy during the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

Although the Second World War temporarily suspended political change, it also gave Newfoundland the financial resources it needed to end Commission of Government. Wartime prosperity brought full employment and greatly increased government revenues. The Commission reported the first of several surpluses in 1941 and made a series of interest-free loans to Britain in the following years. By 1942, Newfoundland, British, and Canadian officials recognized the Commission would likely disappear when the war was over. But what form of government would replace it?

A New Path

The British government began to consider this question in 1942. Officials were pessimistic about Newfoundland's ability to exist as an independent country and worried that, once the wartime boom ended, its economy would again deteriorate and Britain might once more be called on to financially help out Newfoundland. Officials in the Dominions Office soon thought that Newfoundland should join Canada and benefit from that country's more stable economy. This possibility also appealed to many Canadian officials. The war had shown Canada that it had important and permanent interests in Newfoundland, which needed to be protected. Apprehension also existed in Ottawa that Newfoundland might draw closer to the United States than Canada once the war ended.

It would ultimately be up to the Newfoundland people to decide their own political fate, however, and in 1943 a "goodwill mission" of three British Members of Parliament visited Newfoundland to determine which form of government residents favoured. Their investigations indicated that a fair degree of uncertainty existed – although very few people seemed interested in confederation, there was also widespread unease about an immediate and unconditional return to responsible government status. Recognizing that no form of elected government had existed in Newfoundland since 1934 and people were no longer accustomed to party politics, British officials decided that a process of political education was needed before Newfoundlanders and Labradorians decided on their future. In November 1943, the Dominions Secretary recommended that once hostilities ended, the British government should provide "machinery … for enabling the Newfoundland people to examine the situation and to express their considered views as to the form of Government they desire."

The exact nature of this "machinery" was revealed on December 11, 1945, when British Prime Minister Clement Atlee announced in the House of Commons that the Newfoundland public would elect representatives to a National Convention. The mandate of this National Convention would be to investigate Newfoundland's economic, social, and political status and recommend which forms of government should be placed on a referendum ballot. The referendum was tentatively scheduled for the fall of 1947.

5.113 The Second World War highlighted the importance of Newfoundland and Labrador's strategic defensive position to North America.
Shown here are civilians mixing with Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) members at a dance at the RCAF Station in Gander, in March 1945.

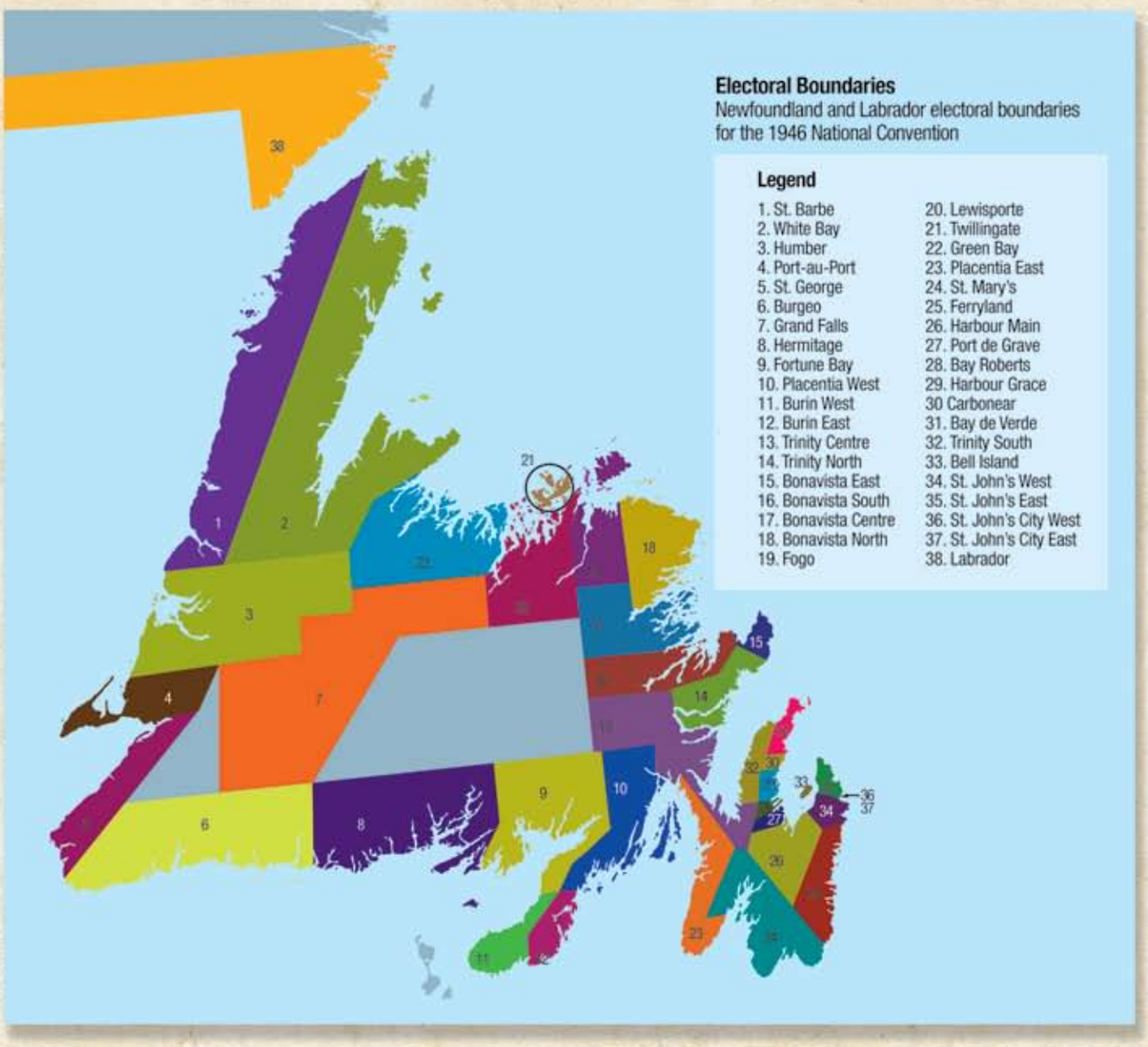
WHY DID CANADA WANT NEWOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR?

Canada had several key reasons for wanting Newfoundland in confederation:

- **to gain control of its natural resources**
- **to improve national defence**
- **to prevent the United States from acquiring undue influence in the region**

As historian Peter Neary explains, "… Confederation would secure Canada's eastern frontier, simplify her defence administration, and head off the looming threat of a Newfoundland ever more closely tied to the United States. The transformation of Newfoundland into a 'garrison country' during the Second World War and the entry of the United States into the region had fundamentally altered Anglo-Canadian Newfoundland relations."

After the war, unease grew in Canada about the continued American military presence in Newfoundland. In 1903, Canada had essentially lost out to the United States in a bid for an area along the Pacific Ocean now known as the Alaska Panhandle. It wanted to avoid being similarly hemmed in on its Atlantic coast. Embracing Newfoundland within confederation would not only give control over such strategic locations as Gander airport and St. John's harbour, but also positively affect Canada's national outlook and show that Canada was just as serious in world affairs during peacetime as during war.



5.114 Newfoundland and Labrador electoral boundaries for the 1946 National Convention.

*Labrador voters sent United Church clergyman, Rev. Lester Burry to the National Convention; he was the region's first political representative.

The Creation of the National Convention

On June 21 1946, voters in Newfoundland and in Labrador elected 45 members from 38 districts to the National Convention. This was the first general election since 1932 and the first time in history that Labrador residents were able to vote. Nevertheless, voter turnout was low in most districts, excluding St. John's, where about 60 per cent of voters went to the polls. About half of all the candidates elected were businessmen or merchants; the others included journalists, teachers, union leaders, lawyers, and clergymen.

The National Convention met for the first time on September 11, 1946. It established 10 committees to examine various aspects of the country's economy and society. Their reports were to be brought to the full Convention for discussion and adoption. When this process was completed, it was the responsibility of the finance committee, using the information provided in the reports, to write a consolidated report on the economic and financial situation and the country's outlook.

"It shall be the duty and function of the Convention to ... examine the position of the country and to make recommendations to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom as to possible forms of future government to be put before the people at a national referendum."

– From Section 3 of the *National Convention Act* of 1946

*The National Convention debates were broadcast to thousands of listeners over the government radio station, VONF.

Ottawa/London Delegations

It was assumed that discussion of possible future forms of government would occur only after committee work was finished. However, this orderly program was upset on October 28, less than two months after the Convention's first meeting – when Joseph R. Smallwood moved that a delegation should visit Ottawa to ascertain possible terms of union with Canada. Smallwood's motion had only 17 supporters, and started a bitter and divisive debate* that split the Convention into pro-confederate and anti-confederate groups. In these circumstances, an impartial assessment of the country's condition and prospects became a near impossibility.

In the end, the Convention decided to send delegations to London and Ottawa, with both to be led by the Convention's chairman, F. Gordon Bradley, who was an active confederate himself. The London delegation was composed mainly of anti-confederates, of whom the most vocal was Peter Cashin. It left Newfoundland on April 25, 1947, and had three meetings with a British delegation headed by the Dominions Secretary. The British made it clear that if Newfoundland decided to return to responsible government, it could expect no financial or economic assistance. This attitude enraged anti-confederate leaders. Cashin delivered an emotional speech to the Convention on May 19, claiming that a conspiracy existed "to sell this country to the Dominion of Canada."

5.115 Peter Cashin

5.116 The London Delegation of the National Convention, May 1947

The Ottawa delegation departed on June 19. Bradley told the Convention its members would be back within a month. However, he and Smallwood, who also was a member of the delegation, had no such intention. Their plan was to stay in Ottawa until they obtained acceptable draft terms of union from the Canadian Government to be discussed by the Convention and then placed before the electorate. This process would, they hoped and expected, postpone the referendum from the fall of 1947 until sometime in 1948 and give confederates more time to promote their cause.

5.117 The Ottawa Delegation of the National Convention, 1947
Shown here (left to right): G.F. Higgins; J.R. Smallwood; T.G.W. Ashbourne; Louis St. Laurent; F. Gordon Bradley; Rev. Lester Burry; C.H. Ballam; and P.W. Crummey.

5.118 Counting telegrams requesting that Confederation be placed on the referendum ballot, 1948
Part of the Confederation petition team. Standing (left to right): J.R. Smallwood and Irving Fogwill. Seated (left to right): Jen Fogwill, Harold Horwood, Clara Smallwood and Roy Pike.

*Smallwood later described the opponents of the motion as the "29 dictators."

The End Result

Finally, the Convention had to recommend which forms of government should appear on the referendum ballot. All members agreed that both responsible government and the continuation of the Commission of Government should be on the ballot. Smallwood then moved a resolution on January 23, 1948 that confederation with Canada should be a third option. The debate that followed was the climax of the Convention. Long and emotional, it did not end until 5:30 a.m. on January 28. The motion was defeated by 29 votes* to 16, and the Convention dissolved two days later. However, the anti-confederate victory was short-lived. The British government overruled the Convention and announced in early March that confederation would be placed on the ballot after all. It was not going to let the chance slip away that Newfoundland might join Canada.

While some historians have played down the importance of the National Convention, others feel that it had a significant role in our history. As Convention debates were broadcast by radio, the National Convention served as a vehicle of political education. The political apathy so evident in 1946 was replaced by the enthusiastic involvement of an electorate that was much better informed on the country's options – and particularly about confederation and what joining Canada might offer.

5.119

… and oh, what a battle it was!

the debate, motion and vote on Newfoundland's entry into Confederation

Joseph Smallwood speaking at the National Convention

I pledge myself to this House and to this country that I will base my ultimate stand in this whole question of confederation upon the nature of the terms that are laid before the Convention and the country. If the terms are such as clearly suggest a better Newfoundland for our people I shall support and maintain them …

These, then, are the conditions of my support of confederation: that it must raise our people's standard of living, that it must give Newfoundlanders a better life, that it must give our country stability and security and that it must give us full, democratic responsible government under circumstances that will ensure its success …

If you adopt this resolution (that the Convention send a delegation to Canada to investigate union), and Canada offers us generous terms, as I believe she will, and Newfoundland decides to shake off her ancient isolation, I believe with all my heart and mind that the people will bless the day this resolution was moved.

Peter Cashin speaking at the National Convention

I say that there is in operation at the present time a conspiracy to sell, and I use the word "sell" advisedly, this country to the Dominion of Canada. I repeat, some people may think I am talking wildly, but I would ask them to remember that long before this I made statements in this house which were regarded at the time as wild prophecies, but time proved that I was right.

All I ask you then to do in the present instance, is to watch events develop in the coming two months, then pass your judgement on the statements I make today. Watch in particular the attractive bait which will be held out to lure our country into the Canadian mouse-trap. Listen to the flowery sales talk which will be offered you, telling Newfoundlanders they are a lost people, that our only hope, our only salvation, lies in following a new Moses into the promised land across the Cabot Strait.

By the way, I note by recent papers, that there are 30 000 men unemployed in the Maritimes alone. Can it be that things are so wonderful in this Paradise that men don't need to work? Gentlemen, before leaving this matter I would say just this, look out for those amongst us who would take ourselves and our country on a one-way ride …

Questions:

1. Why did Britain establish the National Convention instead of immediately returning Newfoundland to responsible government after the war?
2. What was the National Convention? What were its roles?
3. Why might voters have been more apathetic in 1946 than they were in 1948?
4. What role did the media play in the National Convention? How does the media affect your understanding of, and interest in, municipal, provincial, and federal politics?

AT ISSUE

The Right to Vote

5.120 Sign at polling station

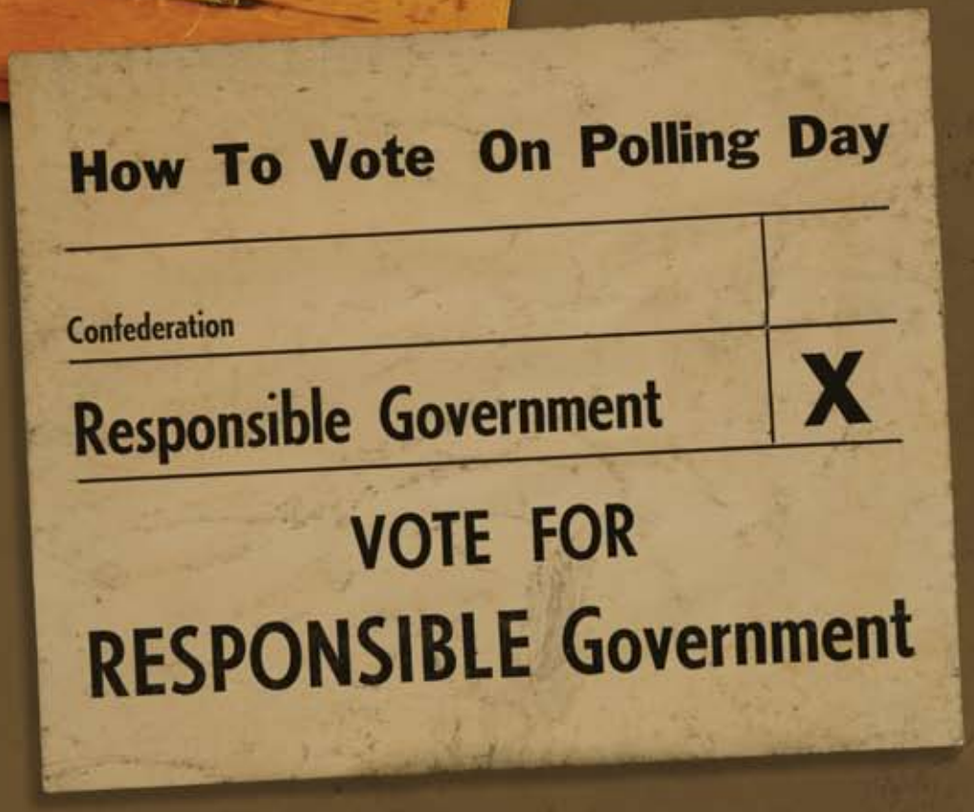
Government voting rights in Newfoundland and Labrador have undergone several changes in the last two centuries. Today we have universal suffrage, but a significant portion of the eligible population still does not vote. Why is this? Is voting a right or is it a responsibility?

During the era of the migratory fisheries, no form of elected government existed in the colony and residents were governed by British authorities. This changed in 1832, after a local reform movement convinced Britain to grant the colony representative government. Voting rights were extended to male British subjects who were at least 21 years old and had lived on the island as tenants or property owners for at least one full year* before the election took place. Women were not allowed to vote, nor were Labrador residents.

Unlike today, early voters did not cast their ballots in secret and instead had to stand and be counted at the various polling stations. Lack of privacy left voters vulnerable to intimidation or bribery from individuals wishing to manipulate election results, and bullying did occur at some polling stations. This changed in 1887, when the Newfoundland government passed laws requiring all elections to be held by secret ballot. Another difference between voting methods then and now is that in the 1830s the voting process often took days to complete and did not always occur at the same time in the various districts. In 1832, for example, polling at Conception Bay lasted from October 31 to November 3, while voting in St. John's ran from November 5 to 12. This changed in 1842, when Britain passed a bill stipulating that all future Newfoundland elections must occur simultaneously.

*Britain increased this to two years in 1842.

5.122 The first ballot box in Newfoundland and Labrador
This box was presented to Sir Robert Bond who introduced the Ballot Bill in 1887, which provided for voting by secret ballot.



5.121 A card from the July 1948 referendum
urging voters to vote for Responsible Government.

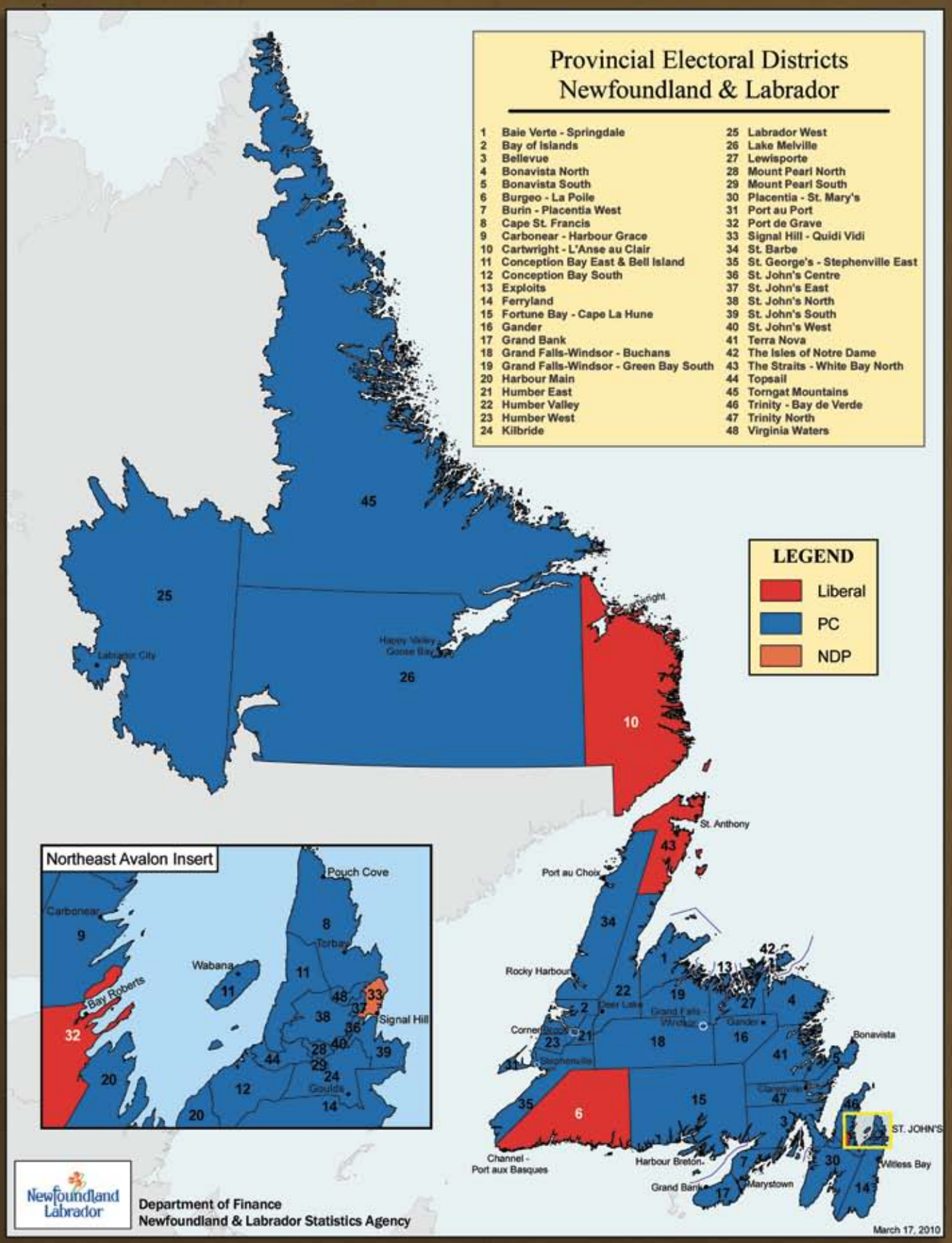
Women in Newfoundland won the right to vote and run for public office in April 1925, after decades of lobbying government officials. Unlike male residents, however, women had to be 25 years or older to vote. On October 29, 1928, 52 343* Newfoundland women cast ballots in their first general election. Two years later, Lady Helena Squires became the first woman elected into the country's House of Assembly.

In 1934, however, Newfoundland voluntarily suspended its right to self-government and swore in the Commission of Government. It was not until 1946 that people returned to the polls to elect members of the National Convention. This time, all residents age 21 and older were eligible to vote, including those living in Labrador. When the polls opened on June 21, 1946, almost half of all eligible voters had never cast a ballot before, having been too young to participate in the previous election 14 years earlier. Approximately two years later, a slim majority of Newfoundland and Labrador voters (52.3 per cent) chose to join Canada in a 1948 referendum.

*This was a 90 per cent voter turnout for women on the island!

Today, residents of this province can participate in municipal, provincial, and federal elections once they reach the age of 18. Governments at all three levels typically remain in office for four years or until a general election is called. A general election takes place in all electoral districts on the same day. In contrast, a by-election typically takes place in a single district. This usually occurs after an individual politician leaves his or her seat between regularly scheduled general elections, making it necessary for voters in that district to elect a new representative.

5.123 Provincial electoral districts as of March 2010



Once an election has been called, there are several ways to vote. The most common way is for a voter to visit the polling station* in his or her district to cast a ballot on election day. Residents who will be unable to do this may apply to participate in advance polls that take place during a specified time period before the actual election day. Additionally, citizens who will be out of their districts on election day may still vote by special ballot – which is essentially a mail-in ballot.

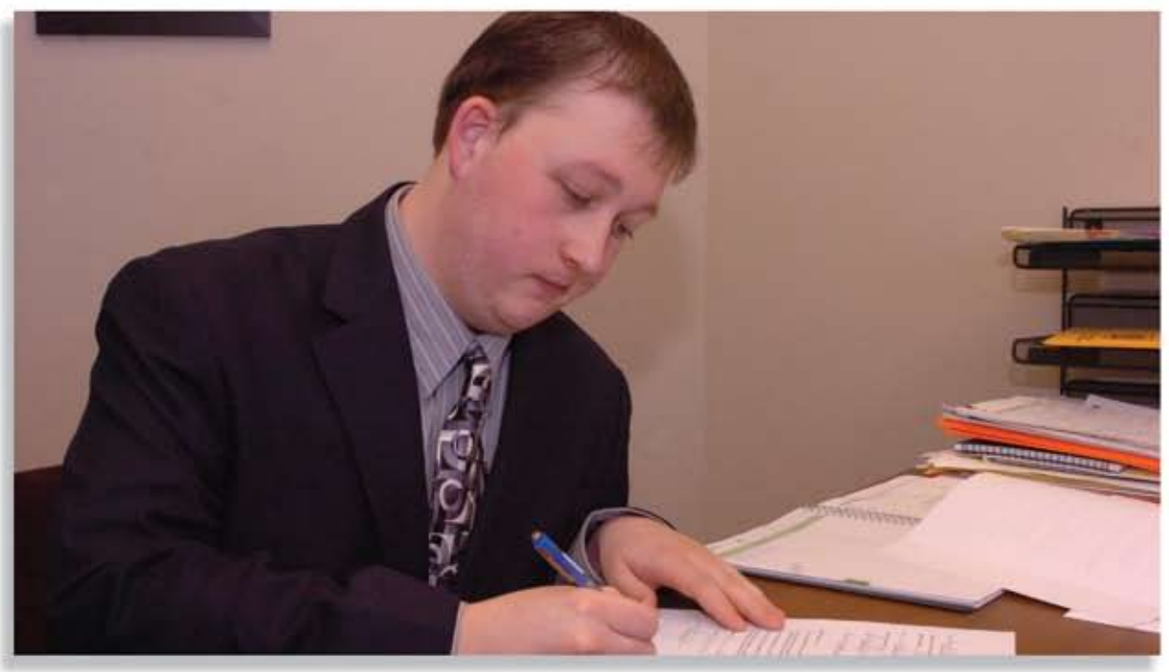
Despite these options and universal suffrage, not all people exercise their right to vote. In the 2007 provincial election, for example, only 60.2 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots. Although voter turnout is low among all age groups, it is particularly a problem among young voters. Elections Canada estimates that only 44 per cent of electors aged 18 to 24 participated in the 2006 federal election, while overall voter turnout was 64.7 per cent.

*Postal voting is also growing in popularity. The city of St. John's, for example, asked voters to use mail-in ballots during its 2009 municipal election instead of visiting polling stations.

Voter turnout for the 2008 federal election was 58.8 per cent – an all-time low. Newfoundland and Labrador had the worst provincial rate of voter turnout with only 48.1 per cent of voters turning out.

"Age … affects (voter) turnout … Recent studies indicate that … not only are young people participating less than their elders, their willingness to participate appears to be declining over time."

– From *A History of the Vote in Canada*, Elections Canada website



5.124 Kurtis Coombs, 19, briefly mayor-elect of Paradise

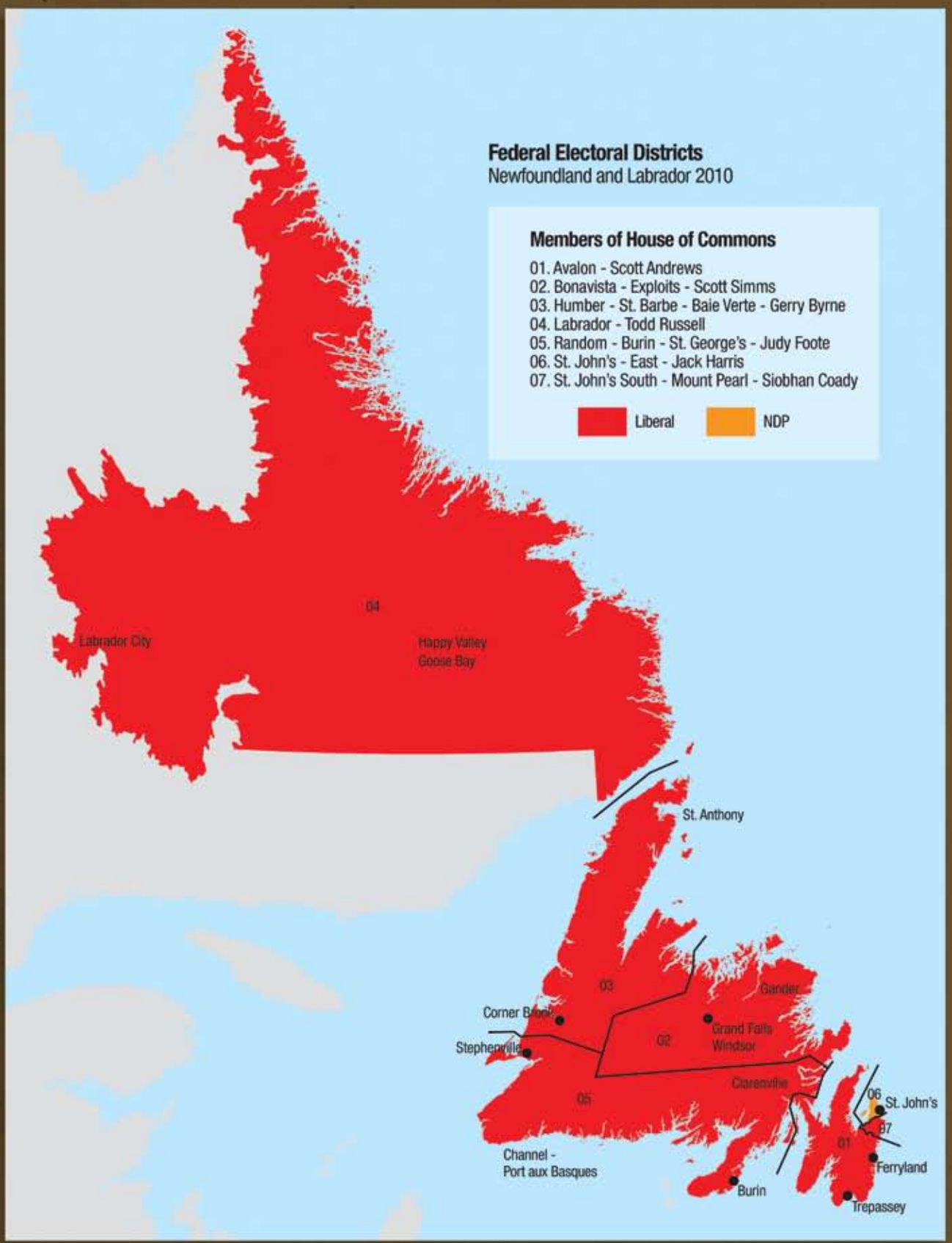
When one vote could have made the difference …

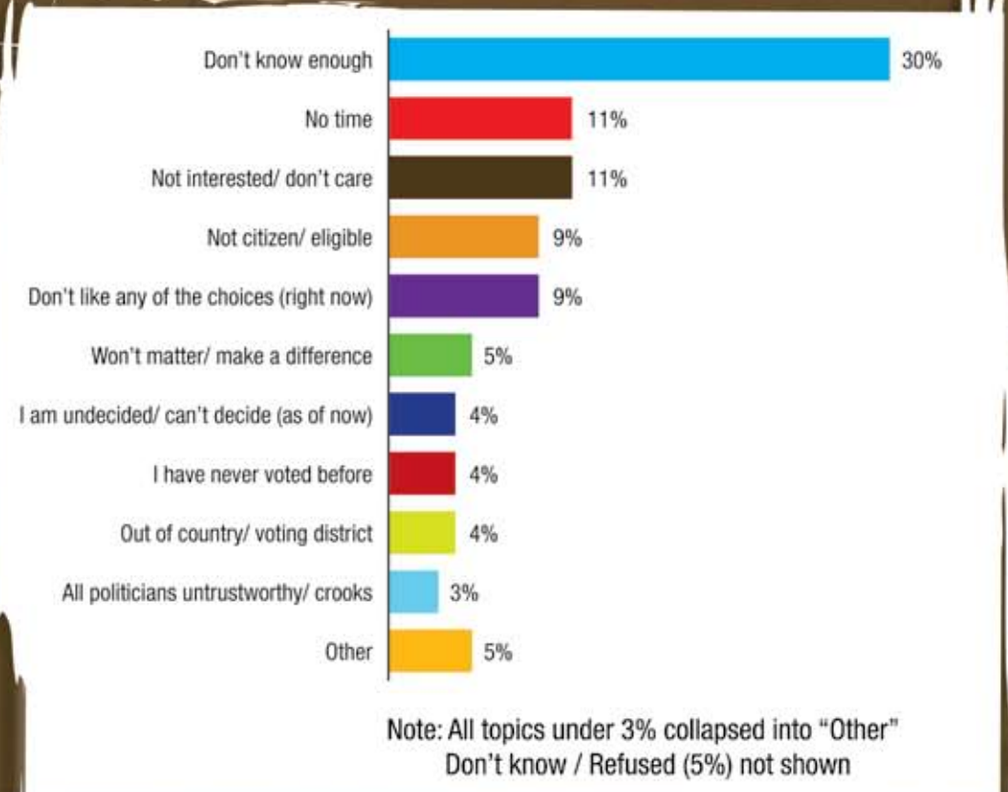
On September 29, 2009, 19-year-old Kurtis Coombs became Canada's youngest mayor after winning a municipal election in Paradise by three votes. Two days later, however, a re-count showed that he had actually tied with fellow candidate Ralph Wiseman. According to provincial law, a draw then had to take place to determine the winner. As a result, both names were written on slips of paper and placed inside a container (a recycling bin was used). In the end, Wiseman's name was pulled out of the box, making him mayor of Paradise. Some Paradise residents called for a re-election, but the provincial Supreme Court ultimately ruled against Coombs' application to overturn the results and have a new election ordered.

In a survey on youth voting, common reasons given by young people for not voting included not having enough information about the candidates running for office, not having enough time, and not being interested. (See fig. 5.124.) Many see this trend of low turnout by young voters as troubling. In a 2008 report, Chief Electoral Officer Paul Reynolds stated: "The youth are our future and if we fail to engage them now, the political history of this province could be lost."

Voting is important because it gives us a say in how our country, province, and communities are governed. By taking part in an election, we choose our political leaders and help our democracy work. Reformers recognized this in the early 1800s and so did suffragists in the early 1900s – that's why they fought so hard to win the right to vote.

5.125 Federal electoral districts as of 2010





5.126 Top reasons given by youth for not voting

For Discussion:

1. Is it important to vote? Explain.
2. Create a list of ways that people under the age of 18 can be politically active. Which of these have you done? What can you do to be more politically active?
3. What can politicians, election organizers, educators, the media, or society in general do to increase voter turnout among young people?
4. Why did reformers in the early 1800s and women suffragists in the early 1900s fight so hard to win the right to vote?
5. Voting is mandatory in Australia, where voter turnout is usually about 90 per cent. (Compare this to a 58.8 per cent voter turnout in Canada's 2008 federal election). Voters who do not appear at the polls in Australia and do not have a legitimate excuse (such as illness, travel, or religious objections) have to pay a small fine of approximately $15. Do you agree with this policy? Why or why not?

Questions:

1. Do you intend to vote in elections after you turn 18? Why or why not?
2. Ask someone in your family why he or she votes. List the reasons. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not?
3. Imagine you are a politician running for office. What would you do to appeal to young voters?
4. Consider the Paradise municipal election in September 2009 (See fig. 5.122). Would a higher voter turnout have prevented the election from resulting in a tie?
5. Will this issue convince more young people to vote? Why?

Chapter Five Review

Summary

In this chapter we studied some of the main events in Newfoundland and in Labrador during the first half of the twentieth century. We began by examining the First World War and how it affected Newfoundland and Labrador. This was followed by a discussion of the women's suffrage movement in Newfoundland. We then studied the Great Depression of the 1930s and its effects on the country. We examined the Amulree Report and its recommendations, and the establishment of the Commission of Government in Newfoundland. Our attention shifted to the study of the Second World War, including the contributions of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to the war effort, and the effects of the war. We examined how Aboriginal groups in Newfoundland and in Labrador were affected during this time period. Finally, we studied the National Convention in 1946 and the result of that convention.

Key Ideas

Specifically, we studied the following key ideas:

- Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and the Newfoundland government, made substantial contributions to the First World War, and experienced significant social, political, and economic effects during and after the war.
- There were four phases of the women's suffrage movement in Newfoundland, which resulted in women receiving the right to vote in 1925.
- Various factors, such as an increasing public debt, the slump in international markets for dried cod, and the Great Depression, created widespread poverty and hardship in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- The Newfoundland government was on the verge of bankruptcy and a Royal Commission was appointed in 1933 to decide the country's future. The subsequent Amulree Report recommended that Newfoundland give up responsible government temporarily and be ruled by an appointed Commission of Government.
- A Commission of Government was appointed in Newfoundland in 1934. This government initiated a number of reforms in the fishery, education, public health, welfare, and law enforcement to improve life in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Newfoundlanders and Labradorians made significant contributions to the Second World War. The war had major economic, social, and political impacts on Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Aboriginal groups in Newfoundland and Labrador were impacted by events such as economic diversification, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. They faced challenges in maintaining a traditional lifestyle.
- A National Convention was held in 1946 to investigate Newfoundland's status and recommend which forms of government should be placed on a referendum ballot. As a result of the referendum, Newfoundland became Canada's tenth province in 1949.

Key Terms

Amulree Report
Confederation
Depression
Dole
Gender equality
Leased Bases Agreement
National Convention
National Government
Newfoundland Patriotic Association
Newfoundland Ranger Force
Newfoundland Regiment
Referendum
Reforms
Royal Commission
Suffrage
Subsistence lifestyle
Women's Patriotic Association
Women's Franchise League

Questions

1. What were the most significant social, political, and economic effects of the First World War on Newfoundland and Labrador?

2. What were three main reasons why women won the right to vote in Newfoundland in 1925?

3. What were the negative effects of the Great Depression on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? What did the Newfoundland Government do to help alleviate these effects? How effective was this approach?

4. What did the Amulree Report recommend? Why was the Amulree Report well-received by most members of the public at the time?

5. What was the most significant reform introduced by the Commission of Government in each of the following areas? Explain why.
   a. Fisheries b. Education c. Public Health d. Welfare e. Law Enforcement

6. What was the main impact of the Second World War on Newfoundland and Labrador? Explain.

7. What challenges to living a traditional lifestyle were faced by Aboriginal groups during the first half of the twentieth century?

8. Outline the process which led to Newfoundland joining Canada in 1949. Was this an acceptable process? Explain.