Community and Social Interactions

Home remedies, funeral traditions, quaint figures of speech, sheep shearing, unusual toys, and others

Table of Contents

- Community involvement at funerals
- Home remedies
- Ice pans and Sealing
- Ida's Brook, water source
- Making shavings by John Hedderson
- Making shavings by Winston Colbourne
- Mermaid's Pincushion
- Quaint figures of speech
- Sheep shearing, a family tradition
- Unusual toys

Community Involvement at Funerals
Waking and burying the dead

With the passage of the years, the old skills, customs and traditions are being caught up in the wake of Time, so that the memories written on the hearts of those who have been steeped in these traditions will eventually disappear like the wake of the sea, to be seen no more.

When roads first provided a link between outport communities on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland in the mid-1960s, they introduced a different way of life for people who had previously lived in isolation. Isolation certainly had its drawbacks, but in some ways the advent of roads led to the unravelling of traditions that had once been the warp and weave of society as people knew it.

New roads were able to connect people and communities, while social events within the communities provided a connection on a more personal level. Some of these social events were:

- Times (dinners, dances, and darts);
- Births (midwives);
- Deaths (grave diggers, casket-makers, and those who washed and dressed the dead);
- Spring and fall boat launchings and haul-ups;
- Storms (people watched out for each other, kept tabs on lights in houses, watched for chimney smoke, noticed whether or not people were outside after a storm, and shovelled snow off roofs of houses that had been buried);
- Weddings and receptions (held in local homes, involving most of the community).

<u>How the community came together when someone died</u>

Prior to the 1980s, when someone in the community of Ship Cove died, the family of the deceased did not have to be anxious about the mechanics of burying the dead, or of being left alone to 'wake' the dead, nor did they have to wonder how or what to prepare in the way of food for friends or family. For generations, people in this outport community rallied to support those in mourning.

In the early '80s, a funeral home established itself in St. Anthony on the Great Northern Peninsula. Most people nowadays take advantage of what the funeral home has to offer, yet there are still customs and traditions that assist a family through the first days of bereavement in the community; traditions that have endured for generations.

In many communities these traditions are fast disappearing; young people who would normally have learned these skills from their parents have left the area in search of work. One tradition that has survived to this day is that of grave digging, but there will come a time when even that will be done away with. Graves will no longer be dug by hand; people will hire someone with a machine to dig them, and the reason is obvious: most of the men currently digging graves are well past the age of sixty and there no up-and-comers to replace them.

Pearce Tucker, now in his mid-60s, is a grave digger like his father before him. At the age of 15 Pearce was introduced to grave-digging first-hand. Did he have a choice? Not really.

"When I got old enough and someone in the community died, Dad said, 'Now boys, get the shovel and get down to the graveyard.' That was the rule."

Generally, it's the same people in the community who dig the graves and when a man gets up in years and can no longer dig, he passes the skills and tools down to the next generation.

Unless things change, Ship Cove has seen its last generation of grave diggers.

Not an easy job

It's not an easy job to dig a grave. Many times, in fall and winter for instance, grave diggers have had to erect a piece of canvas as a windbreak when the weather is bad. There are usually six men to a dig. The grave is framed-out with an axe and the sod is removed, then two men work for ten or fifteen minutes with a pick and a shovel. When those two men need a break, two other men take over, and so it goes until the grave is dug. Something to bear in mind, too, is that grave diggers have a close, personal connection to the person they're digging the grave for. That's just the way it is in small communities and, because of that, there is always a great deal of respect when it comes to laying a person to rest.

In Ship Cove, Mrs. Iris Decker says the honorary grave digger has always been in charge of proceedings. "It used to be Fred Noseworthy, but he passed it on to his son, Arthur." Arthur Noseworthy is usually the person called upon when someone dies; he makes sure he has a team of men to dig the grave. His duties are not limited to grave digging; he ensures chairs are set out at the church and that there is someone to remain with the body while it is at the church.

Names of past and present grave diggers are: the Noseworthy men; Herb Tucker and a number of his sons; Jack Andrews' sons; Hedley Andrews; Guy Hurley; Ross Decker, and a few others who were willing to assist if called upon.

It is only in recent years that members of a deceased's family have acted as pall bearers. Previously, a family member never carried a casket; that task usually fell to the grave diggers or other men in the community.

Essential services that went way back

Figure 1 A bolt of purple damask cloth, sold in Gersh Elliott's store in Raleigh, was used to cover the coffin.

Figure 2 Handles like this were affixed to the coffin.

In past times, it wasn't only the grave digger that was needed when a person died. There were men and women whose skills made them essential, and they didn't have to be asked; they automatically helped out. Kenneth Tucker usually washed and dressed a body for burial. There were various craftsmen in the community who made caskets, which were of a much simpler and plainer design than you would see today.

Jack Andrews, Kenneth Tucker, Francis Tucker and Uncle Tom Tucker were skilled casket makers.

When there was a death in the community these men were already prepared, and had the tools and supplies on hand to make the caskets. Pearce recalls, "What men did back then in the spring of the year, perhaps on the last trip into the woods—they would look for a likely tree, big enough to make boards at least a foot wide, and that would be for coffin boards."

Uncle Reginald Decker, who ran the community store, had a stock of white, grey or purple damask material on hand: white to use as a burial shroud, and purple or grey material to cover the coffin. The damask was affixed to the outside of the casket with thumb tacks and the white cotton was used to line the inside of the casket. Lastly, the body was wrapped in a burial shroud.

Pinking a shroud

Although some might think that 'pinking a shroud' has everything to do with dying a piece of material pink, that couldn't be further from the truth. Pinking a shroud is an art that seems to have vanished from northern Newfoundland according to Mrs. Ruby Decker of Ship Cove, but she remembers seeing it done in her childhood, and she remembers Aunt Louise Pynn's funeral in Raleigh—around 1958—and that was the last time she saw a shroud 'pinked'. The term pinking a shroud likely came from the fact that scissors were used to cut cloth, but not pinking shears, as some might expect. The art of cutting designs into cloth was sometimes referred to as 'cut work', and it would have been the opposite of embroidery.

"Pinking a shroud always amazed me—even as a child," recalls Mrs. Decker. "I was intrigued by work that was done on the casket when they made them and how they covered them. But most of all I can see the older people 'pinking the shrouds'. The ladies didn't have actual pinking shears; they used scissors. They would take the white cotton sheeting or white broadcloth, put a tiny little fold into it, and clip out leaves and flowers; in the same way people fold paper and make snowflakes. They used to make designs on the border of the shroud—perhaps nine to 12 inches wide. The workmanship was all done by hand, with not a loose thread showing. The shroud was then draped over the head of the deceased in the way you see pictures of the mantle draped over the head of the Virgin Mary, covering the shoulders. Just before the casket was closed, the shroud was pulled over the face of the deceased.

"Pinking the shroud is an art that—as far as I know—has completely vanished; it's many, many years since I've seen it," says Mrs. Decker. "I remember there could be four or five people all working on the shroud at the same time."

A little boy's funeral

Often, if an infant died, the father of the family would craft a casket himself. Pearce remembers when his brother Boyd died of a burst appendix at the age of two-and-a-half, Pearce, himself, was about eight years old at the time. A number of men in the community made the little boy's coffin.

The toddler's death was unexpected, so the bereaved mother had no black dress to wear for his funeral. This was in the day when people dressed for mourning, and mourning lasted over a period of three sunrises. Pearce recalls how his mother called him into her room and said, "Mam got n'er black dress to wear. Go over to Aunt Aggie's or Aunt Ella's and if they don't have n'er black dress, go and ask Pearl Roberts." Pearl Roberts was able to provide a black dress for Pearce's mother to wear. "Mother cried everlasting over Boyd's death," recalls Pearce.

How the community pulled together

When there was a death in the community—prior to telephones—someone usually walked around the community to let people know. Leonard Tucker recalls when his great grandfather William John Tucker died in 1963, "Uncle Bill came up over the hill, and he was heading down for Ship Cove, and he never came in the house that morning. He just announced, 'Will-John died.' My mother immediately reached over and closed the curtains."

Leonard remembers a large group of relatives from Raleigh showed up because Great-Grandfather William John, who had married Miriam Taylor from Raleigh, had many connections. His casket remained at his home for three days; then it was carried down to the church over a mile away. After the service, those who attended walked behind the casket to the cemetery, another mile to Graveyard Hill.

In 1966, when William Jr. (Bill) Tucker died unexpectedly, his body was sent from St. Anthony to Raleigh in a casket, and it fell to Selby Tucker, Herb Tucker (Bill's brother), and Herb's son, Pearce, to collect the corpse and bring it back to Ship Cove in a boat. On the way home from Raleigh, Pearce recalls, "There was a storm of southerly wind, it was blowing hard, and the boat was facing right into the wind. There was too much wind to get through *The Gut* (the Onion Tickle), so Selby had to motor out around the Onion and come back that way." It was a rough ride and, when they arrived at the wharf, Selby cautioned Herb, 'Now, Herb, have Fred open the casket and have a look before Aunt Annie sees him.'

From home to church

Once someone in the community died, the body was usually 'waked' at home. The term 'wake' isn't used much anymore, if at all. Mrs. Ruby Decker, who arrived in Ship Cove in 1948, remarks, "People used to say 'I'm going to a wake.' I remember when Grandmother Decker died in 1966, she was in an open casket and people came by the house to offer their respects, and some people stayed all night."

Staying up all night with the family was sometimes referred to as a wake.

In later years the corpse was no longer kept in the home, but in the church, and one of the elders in the community would make a point of staying with the family at the church until they were ready to go home at night. There were instances of people sitting with the corpse around the clock, but that is rare nowadays.

In the old days, when the time came for the church service, blinds were kept down as the casket was passing through the community, a custom that Mrs. Iris Decker remembers well. Men would carry the casket by hand from the home to the church. "You had your blinds down to show respect. And when the casket was carried from the church to the cemetery, everyone followed. It was a long walk, but everyone did it."

An added comfort: food

And finally, there is another tradition that endures to the present day. When there is a funeral, women in the community have always provided a much-needed service; the provision of food. Mrs. Iris Decker says, "We prepare meals and do whatever the family wants done. The women of the community make something individually and take it up to their home while the visitors are there. If they're in our church family, then the day of the funeral we take food up to them after the funeral. Sometimes the meal after the funeral has been in the church, but a lot of times it is in their homes."

A thing of the past

But sadly, all these customs and traditions are gradually being laid aside, and all the personal touches—which have been a solace to grieving families for generations—have almost become a thing of the past.

Figure 3 a picture of the Ship Cove cemetery on Grave Yard Hill. Photo courtesy of Wayne Bartlett, Quirpon

Home Remedies and cures
A medicine chest of memories

Figure 4 Folks used home-cures or patented tonics. Bottles courtesy of Bonnie Andrews.

Summer Moles: Freckles, many years ago, were also called *summer moles*. When summer moles appeared in spring, a person would wait for the first snow in May and collect enough snow to melt, then wash their face in this water for a few mornings and the freckles would fade away.

Catholics also collected the first snow of May to use as Holy Water.

Cleansing after calving: a juniper drink was made. It was said to cleanse the cow's system.

Tonic: a spoonful of cod liver oil was taken once a day as a tonic. Fishermen would take a sip of cod liver oil right out of the barrel, or dip their finger into the barrel.

Thrush: treatment for 'white mouth', or Thrush (yeast infection), was to spread honey on the affected part.

Old-fashioned pacifier: when a baby was cranky, someone would take a square of cloth, put a teaspoon of sugar into it, join the four corners, and tie the ends with shop line (string). Then the 'pacifier' would be given to the baby to suck on.

Frostbite: in freezing weather, if one person noticed frostbite forming on a person's extremities, they'd stoop down, take a handful of snow, and rub the affected area. Apparently that warded off frostbite, or minimized its effects.

Snow blindness: the scraped-out pulp of a raw potato was applied to the affected eyes on a regular basis until the person could see again.

Cuts: Turpentine from the tree healed the wound and sealed it.

Dirty blood: Juniper or spruce, steeped out into a tea, was a tonic. It would 'drive the dirt out of your blood.'

Cold Sores: a simple remedy which is said to cure a stubborn cold sore in less than two days. The cure is inexpensive and you don't have to travel far to find it. It is less than an arm's-length away. Stick your finger in your ear and apply ear wax to the affected lip.

Scurvy: Apparently Jacques Cartier saw the Indians drinking spruce tea, and they didn't have scurvy, so he gave his men spruce steeped into a tea. When steeping juniper, use just the twigs (needles still attached).

Figure 5 Patent medicines and tonics were available over the counter.

Colic: Juniper tea was given to children when they were small. It was boiled and steeped into a tea, and honey or sugar was added for sweetening. Some mothers used Spirits of Nitre instead, which came in a blue bottle from the Gerald S. Doyle Company. It was used for gas or cramps; a few drops in a baby's bottle mixed with water and a little bit of sugar. A search on the Internet reveals that 'sweet spirits of nitre' was used for colds, canker sores, insomnia, tummy ache, earache, and fever.

Upset Stomach: Andrew's liver salts were used.

Burns/scalds: Owl's oil or castor oil was used. Women or men would pluck and roast a winter owl (Snowy owl), drain off the oil, let it cool, and store the oil in jars. It was almost like a salve or cold grease, which was rubbed on the burn.

Bladder infections: juniper tea steeped on the stove and mixed with a bit of sugar or honey.

Diphtheria: people drank soapy water to vomit up the membrane.

Dog bites: wash the affected area and put on iodine or mercurochrome.

Chest infection, sore throat, cuts: People used a spoonful of sugar with friar's balsam and swallowed it.

Sore throat, cough, congestion: Molasses was boiled the stove and mixed it with kerosene until it was sticky, then rolled it into a candy. Sometimes molasses and Minard's Liniment were mixed on a spoon and taken internally.

Boils or water pups: a plaster of flour, sunlight soap and molasses was mixed up, or, alternately, a poultice of sunlight soap and bread. This plaster was placed on the boil and covered with a bandage until it broke; sometimes it might take two applications. If it was put on at night by the next morning the boil would have broken. The poultice was very effective.

"Don't let them squeeze your neck too hard"
by John Hedderson

"I had a boil one time. I was in the orphanage then. So they sent me over to Dr. Curtis. Mrs. Brown said, 'don't let them squeeze your neck too hard.' So I went on over and saw Dr. Curtis, and he took a look at the boil and…well, he was a hard doctor. He had rubber gloves on and, with his two fingers, he took the boil right out, like that. And then he said, 'that's okay.' He looked inside and cleaned it all out, and when he got it done, I never had a boil again."

[i]Tabbying ice pans and hunting seals
A lost tradition

Figure 6 Children playing on the ice. Painting courtesy of Bob Loder, St. Anthony.

On top of the Great Northern Peninsula, usually in May, young children in the coastal communities began thinking about tabbying pans. Some communities folks called it 'tallying' and some called it 'copying'. Copying was when a group of children followed a leader across the ice pans or 'copy-catted' the leader.

Once the sea came in, or a big wind, and the ice broke up, or 'panned up', children began tabbying. As long as the ice stayed near the shore there were always a few days—on the way to school, on the way home from school, or after school—to go tabbying.

Parents didn't object to children tabbying, but if they fell in the water the children might sneak home because the parents knew that they were taking chances.

One man recalls that, as a boy, he used to go up in the bottom of the bay and find a long pole and push himself along on a piece of ice, which he thought was more fun than tabbying.

Kids generally started tabbying pans when they were seven, and kept up the activity right on up into their teens. It was said that 'tabbying' was where boys got your training for the riskier business of sealing.

Figure 7 Children playing on the ice pans. A painting by Bob Loder, St. Anthony.

A natural progression: from tabbying ice pans to sealing

In some communities men went sealing in boats, but when the bays or coves were ice-bound, men walked over the ice to hunt seals.

Sealers wouldn't go on the ice unless the wind was on the land. To go sealing, a man had to have knowledge of the weather and its effect on the ice. One man remembers, "The old fellows could go over on the hill, look at it, and see if you could or could not go sealing, and that was based on the wind and the weather."

Once they had determined to go, they began walking across the ice to what was called the 'standing edge': ice from the shoreline—unbroken—that was frozen and intact. When sealers got to the standing edge, the ice flowed back and forth in front of them with the rushing movement of the water. Between the standing edge and the broken pieces of ice further off was a channel of pure slush, called 'slob', caused by grinding ice. To get to the seals, which were farther off on the ice pans, the men had to bridge the channel of slob-ice. To do that, they would wait for a pan of ice to drift by and jump across.

Figure 8 Men hauling seal pelts across the ice. Photo courtesy of Heritage Newfoundland.

Seal hunters carried a long stick with a hook on it, called a gaff, and they often used the gaff for balance when jumping from pan to pan, or, if a piece of ice was too far off, they used the gaff to pull the ice closer.

Young men often were still in their teens when they first began the seal hunt. "The first time I went out with my grandfather," recalls a man, "I was 14, and there was a vicious northeast wind on the land. The ice pans were [ii]riftering; one pan sliding over another, and that was caused by the pressure of the wind forcing the ice into shore, and it was all squeaky and squealing. I was just terrified. But we went out anyway—just the two of us."

Seal hunters usually took their dogs with them. For one thing, a dog could find a seal where a man couldn't, just by using its nose. Once the seals were pelted the pelts were tied together and then the dogs hauled them home.

"But," he recalls, "Dogs were hard to use on the ice. They'd be hauling seal pelts back across the ice, but one would go around a pinnacle one way, and another dog would go around the other way, and get all tangled up."

But sealers on the northern peninsula weren't just after the pelts; many of them were very fond of seal meat.

"I can remember my grandmother sitting to the window, looking out at the harbour, longing for the seals to come, because by April meat was getting scarce," he recalls. "She said, 'Boys, I think if you went over on the back of the land you might get a seal.'"

Another time, the young man and his uncle went out looking for seals because there was nothing for supper. "We wanted the meat, so you couldn't haul more than one seal each, because they were heavy. I tell you, it wasn't easy hauling the seals over the ice. That ice is never smooth," he said.

"Needless to say," he smiles, "it wasn't long before there was seal in the oven!"

<u>"…that's not to say that we shouldn't"</u>

Men in northern Newfoundland have hunted seals as far back as they can remember. Hunting seals was a way of life…a means of survival. Men hunted, not for sport, but to feed and clothe themselves and their families. It was a custom…a tradition…passed down from father to son. Killing seals was barbaric, but so is the slaughter of any animal.

"You've got people on TV saying, 'Oh, what's wrong with those people at all?' says one man. "I wish I had Ellen Degeneres here to take a good, hard look at what it was like."

Today, there is little requirement for seals on the world market, and the traditional seal hunt is becoming a thing of the past, but people on the northern peninsula still enjoy a bit of seal meat now and then. It's a cultural tradition that stretches back for generations.

"Now, I realize today that hunting seals in not necessary," states one man, speaking of the limitations that have been placed on the seal hunt, "but that's not to say that we shouldn't."

Ida's Brook
Water source for a community

Figure 9 Delilah Tucker remembers that hauling water from the brook was often a family affair. Aaron Beswick photo

Ida's Brook and how it was named

Figure 10 Ida's Brook is still used today, although the fence surrounding it has fallen into disrepair.

Ralph Decker married Ida Pynn of Quirpon. Ralph and Ida built a two-storey house in Ship Cove in the current location of the well, which is known as Ida's Brook. Together they had nine children, but he took sick and died in 1948. When he died, which was around the end of the school year, Ida remained in the house over the winter, then took the children and moved to St. John's, and never returned.

The brook was called Ida's Brook from then on. The house eventually fell into ruin and was dismantled, but the brook remains in use to this day. Local people say the water is excellent for drinking.

People got their water where they could

Before there was plumbing in the community of Ship Cove, people had to get their water where they could. Water was usually obtained from brooks. Some brooks dried up in the summer while others lasted year-round. Delilah Tucker recalls that galvanized buckets were stored in the porch, and these were used to take to the brook to bring water home. Bringing water home from the brook was something everybody helped with, and she recalls taking all the children with her to the brook in the cove to get water. Delilah, and many others like her,

employed [iii]hoops to keep the water from spilling. Every child was anxious to help bring water home, even to the youngest, so Delilah handed out buckets according to their size. For the smallest she fashioned a bucket out of a tinned fruit can, attached a string for a handle, and that's what the child carried to the brook.

Figure 11 Ida's Brook is in sight of the old Methodist graveyard. Across the bay is the community of L'Anse aux Meadows

There were other Brooks in Ship Cove:

- John Brent's brook (might have been a shortened version of John Brenton). This was traditionally a winter brook
- Eel Brook was a winter brook
- Meadow ('Medder') Brook down on the Point

Figure 12 The perimeter fence line at Ida's Brook.

"Making shavings"

John Hedderson
Straitsview

In rural Newfoundland, when the old-fashioned wood stoves were a fixture in every kitchen, [iv]making shavings was a routine that most men attended to at the close of every day. The man of the house would sit down on a chair or on the end of a bed with a box of splits at his feet and a sharp knife—usually a cutthroat knife (used for cutting the throat of fish)—and begin to whittle away at a split until he had it stripped down to thin curls of wood that easily ignited when a match was applied to them.

Figure 13 making shavings with a sharp knife

Time to go home

Because a man usually made shavings at the end of the day, his rising up to make them indicated to visitors that bedtime was imminent and that it was time for everyone to go home; especially young men who might be courting his daughters.

When he was courting Susie at her home in Hay Cove, John Hedderson knew that when her father started making shavings that was a sure sign for him to leave.

"In those times there were no restaurants for a young couple to go to; no pubs; no movie theatres; no cars and no Ski-doos to go out on. A young man did the only thing he could do; he went to see his girl at her family home," laughs John.

"When Susie's father would get up and start making shavings, that was a signal for me; it was time to go home…and a signal to Susie that it was time for bed. Her father never actually told her to go to bed, but she would get up and disappear. She knew there was no point in hanging around because I was going to be [v]drove out anyway. If there were other young men visiting, that was okay, but if they went home and it was just me and Susie…that was another matter," he recalls.

Nighttime traditions
"Making shavings"

Winston Colbourne demonstrates how the old-timers used to make [vi]shavings (called shavin's). With a sharp fishing knife—usually a cutthroater's knife—he cuts the wood downward, causing the wood to curl. These shavings were used the next morning for starting a fire in the woodstove.

[vii]Rampikes and whitings were trees in the woods that people cut and used for kindling.

"In our country years ago, when I was a boy, there was hundreds…hundreds. We'd find a lot of them along the Ship Cove road, and you could pick out all the whitings from among the green trees. They were just as white as fresh [viii]splits with no bark attached. So you'd make your shavings before you'd go to bed. Then someone would say, 'Boy, I believe my dog harness needs to be repaired.' And they might take that out and repair it before bedtime.

Mermaid's Purse or Mermaid's Pincushion

Winston Colbourne
L'Anse aux Meadows

Winston Colbourne has lived over 70 years at Colbourne's Point in L'Anse aux Meadows. He was the son of a fisherman and one of eleven children. He became a fisherman himself, setting up his own fishing enterprise in L'Anse aux Meadows until the Moratorium in 1992 put an end to the fishery in northern Newfoundland. For years after that he left the province to find seasonal employment, but his mind and heart were never far from the sea.

Now retired, Colbourne and his wife, Eliza, live in a house that sits hunched against the wind on a promontory of land jutting into the Atlantic, and he loves nothing more than hard work and being out on the water in a boat, with the bracing salt-sea air in his face.

In this short narrative he describes one of the many treasures he found along the shores of Newfoundland.

Figure 14 Mermaid's pincushion

"This is what we called a mermaid's pincushion (some call it a 'mermaid's purse'). My grandmother had one identical to this but it was handmade. Women of my grandmother's generation probably modelled their homemade pincushions after the actual skate egg, although there is no fabric in the world made like this.

"I've been a fisherman all my life; for the past 55 or 60 years, but I never got the facts on the Mermaid's Pincushion before now. This is a fish egg, and there is a fish inside this pouch. Have you ever heard of a skate, or a maiden ray? That's what this is; a baby skate. Now, isn't that beautiful?

Figure 15 A pouch containing the egg of a skate fish

"We always called this a mermaid's pincushion because you could stick your needle in it. My grandmother used to hang one on the wall to stick her needles in.

"This pouch was washed up on the shore. The skate fish would have had her babies on the ocean floor, and some of them were washed away by the sea. Inside the pouch is a young skate fish. When the pouch is first washed up on the shore its soft like kelp, but when it dries it dries hard.

"When I went on the draggers up around St. Pierre and Miquelon, we fished for skate. A skate can be as big as a tabletop, and the wings of a skate are used to make imitation scallops, so when we fished we'd harvest the wings and heave away the bodies of the fish.

"And sometimes we came across the skate's egg, so we broke it open and there was a tiny skate inside the pouch. Some eggs (or pouches) are much larger than this; it depends on the size of the mother. They're inside the mother fish, and when they're inside the mother, the pouch looks just like you see in the picture. When she lays them, they float around in the water until the tiny fish comes to life and hatches."

Figure 16 Baby skate newly hatched. Source: planetanimalzone.blogspot.ca

Quaint Figures of Speech

Over the course of the past year, I've heard some expressions that were quaint and unusual. I wrote them down as I heard them. I am sure there are many more, but this is just a sampling of some of the unusual expressions heard on the tip of the Northern Peninsula.

Flake-lunger: when speaking about going on a diet to lose weight, "The dietician will give you a diet to follow and after a year you'll look like a [ix]flake-lunger."

Hard as [x]hobnails: when talking about hard bread, people would say, "It's as hard as hobnails."

Deaf as a door knob: referring to someone hard of hearing.

Whiz-giggling: This expression was usually used when kids were giggling and whispering in a corner. "Stop your whiz-giggling."

Smoking like a [xi]tilt: "My parents smoked like tilts."

Mootie: a word that describes feathers in fowl difficult to extract. "The feathers are [xii]mootie."

Gallery: another word for 'bridge' or 'deck'.

Breachy: the word breachy was used when speaking of the water in their well. "It goes breachy sometimes", meaning that it is generally fresh, but sometimes the fresh water is mixed with salt water. English: brackish

Cutty: if the road is 'cutty' it means you're driving along and then suddenly the steering seems to be pulled away from you. This is particularly common on slushy roads. The vehicle "cuts away" from where you are steering. The same describes a boat if the bow strikes the water on a different angle than anticipated causing the boat to cut off course. Cutting is sudden, forceful, dramatic.

Driving works: "The youngsters were driving works in the living room." Similar to "going their length," meaning they're carrying on or fooling around.

Water nipper: a young boy or an older man who brings a jug of water or lemon crystals to working men.

Cranky Boat: One that is unstable; easily tipped

The going is gone: relating to dog teams and komatiks or on snowmobiles. When they can no longer glide easily over the snow or ice because it is melting or patchy.

Sheep Shearing

Mike Sexton

Figure 17 Mike has four ewes and three lambs

It's a June morning in Goose Cove. The skies are overcast; the temperature has dipped below zero and is hovering around -2 degrees Celsius. The wind is from the northeast and is steady at 40 km/h gusting to 65 km/h. A fine rain is coming down, billowing like white sheets on a clothesline. It feels like -6 degrees F. and I'm wishing I'd worn mittens. I pull the hood of my raincoat up over my head as I alight from the car, thinking it's a good thing I wore rubber boots.

Figure 18 The sheep barn

Mike Sexton is up at the sheep barn, and I'm greeted heartily by Mike amid a chorus of baaing sheep—a duck waddles into the sheep barn behind me and pokes its head through the slats to see what it can see. Mike has taken Martha the ewe out of her pen and is clipping her wool with a pair of scissors, or shears. I sit on a vinyl-and-chrome chair as Mike snips carefully

at the sheep's wool. The wind whistles and moans through the eaves of the barn, rattling the heavy plastic lining inside. He has four ewes and three lambs; he will shear the ewes but the lambs won't need it.

Figure 19 A duck pokes its head through the slats to watch the sheep-shearing.

When it comes to shearing sheep, Mike has tried electric shears in the past but finds the scissors gentler on the sheep and more effective. He's not in a hurry; he has only four to shear anyway.

Figure 20 Sheep in their pens awaiting shearing.

Martha is Mike's oldest ewe. At least, he thinks her name is Martha but he's not too sure; he says his daughters named the sheep; he knows them by sight, and that works for him. He keeps sheep because he likes them, and this is obvious when he carefully cuts away at the wool, making sure he doesn't snip Martha's tender skin. He raps out a quote from Walt Disney: "Kindness to animals, my friend, will be rewarded in the end."

Sheep traumatized by a rogue polar bear

Sometimes there are problems associated with keeping sheep. Martha's 'daughter' has produced a lamb two years running, but has refused to care for her offspring. He says she has always been a bit jumpy but he wonders if she was possibly traumatized by a polar bear that broke into the sheep fold two winters ago. Mike says that by the time he got to the barn the polar bear had eaten the shoulder of a lamb. "By the looks of it, the bear threw that lamb around the same way he'd throw a seal, judging from the blood-field," he remarks.

Make no wonder the ewe was traumatized.

As he clips away at her wool, he observes that if it wasn't so cold Martha might actually be enjoying her haircut.

Figure 21 Shearing a sheep takes time and patience.

Mike has his own methods for shearing ewes. When he and his Mother sheared sheep, Mike was usually the one that held them down. He was never kicked or bitten, but the sheep [xiii]fliced around, trying to get up, with Mike struggling to keep them down long enough to shear them properly. He's tried putting them down on their sides to shear them, as his mother did when he was a boy, but he finds its easier to let the sheep stand up, tethered to a snowmobile. Every now and then if Martha thinks the scissors are a little too close for comfort, she'll butt Mike gently with her forehead, as if to say, careful there, buddy!

The first time Mike sheared his sheep he used scissors; the next time he used a set of manual sheep shears that Gillian brought from England. Last year he borrowed some electric shears, but he didn't really like the result. "The wool had no long strands to it. I had it cut too short because I had to go two or three times around." He thinks he'll go back to the old-fashioned shears that Gillian brought back from England.

Once, when Brian Sage, Mike's father-in-law, was over from Bristol, they sheared the sheep together. Mr. Sage held them down while Mike sheared. "Basically, you just have to keep their neck down and you're good, but that blinkin' big old ram, he got tired of it I suppose, and he'd jump up and then we'd have to catch him and wrestle him to the ground again. We had to tip him bottom up to get him over on his side; and he was heavy, too, and stubborn," remembers Mike, chuckling.

When it comes to technique, Mike says, "The idea is to take off the wool in one piece, because if you plan to send it to Briggs & Little Woolen Mills, that's how they want it." To clean the wool, Mike washes it in a barrel of soapy water, picks out the pieces of grass, and allows it air-dry on a homemade [xiv]fish-flake. Once the wool comes back from the mill as yarn, Mike is looking forward to some homemade socks and sweaters, knitted by his wife Gillian.

But Mike has found another use for sheep's wool—as insulation in the barns—"It's asbestos-free, chemical-free…all natural," he laughs.

Once the ewes are shorn they'll feel the cold for a few days, remarks Mike, but the weather should warm up soon and the sheep will get used to it. As to whether he has a preferred location to shear the sheep, Mike says he's sheared them inside and out, and where he shears them depends on weather conditions.

Figure 22 Almost done. A ewe gets a spring haircut as wool piles up in a box to the side.

When I was a boy…

"Back when I was a boy there were a lot more sheep in the community. Hedley Powell and Edward Reardon had sheep, the MacDonalds had sheep, we had sheep, and over across the harbour they had sheep—they were raised for food and for wool.

"Now, I was probably too young to witness people processing the wool: from shearing to dying to spinning to making socks, cuffs and caps, but Mother was telling me about a woman who died her own wool using rock liver…a lichen that grows on the rocks…apparently it was a pretty pink colour.

"But in my memory, most people cleaned the wool and sent it off to the woolen mill to be made into yarn. I suppose I missed out on the old days when they did it themselves from start to finish."

Unusual Toys

Rose Tucker, Ship Cove
Millicent Taylor, Raleigh

Figure 23 Kitchen rules in Millicent's kitchen

Making rattles (maracas) from bird 'paws' and crops

Newfoundlanders are known for their resourcefulness and this is also true when it comes to percussion instruments, or simple children's toys. It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention. And so it is true that many people on the northern peninsula in the mid-20th century didn't possess much money, but they certainly possessed ingenuity.

Some musical instruments that evolved in Newfoundland were spoons, ugly sticks, and washboards. Two little-known percussion instruments that evolved during this time were the partridge crop rattle and the duck paw rattle, and these instruments generated hours of entertainment for children. What Newfoundlanders called rattles might be called maracas today because they were often used as an accompaniment to music.

Duck's paws or feet were easily accessible in the old days. During hunting season when the bird was brought home and plucked, the 'paws' or webbed feet were cut off, roasted and made into rattles, or maracas. Likewise, when a partridge was brought home and plucked, the crop was removed and a toy rattle, or maraca, was fashioned out of it.

Children watched the rattles, or maracas, being made and some folks remember them vividly, but not everyone could recall exactly how they were made.

Rose Tucker of Ship Cove shares her memories of making duck paw rattles and Millicent Taylor of Raleigh shares her memories of how to make a rattle out of a partridge crop.

What is a crop and what is a maraca?

In a bird's digestive system, the crop is an expanded, muscular pouch near the gullet or throat. It is a part of the digestive tract, essentially an enlarged part of the oesophagus. As with most other organisms that have a crop, the crop is used to temporarily store food.

--wikipedia

Figure 24 Left: maracas made from gourds are used in Latin America as an accompaniment to music. Right: the duck paw rattle.

Maracas are made from gourds. They are filled with seeds or pebbles.
Duck paw rattles are made from duck 'paws' and contain beans.

How to make a rattle from a partridge crop

Figure 25 Millicent Taylor recalls making rattles from the crops of partridges.

Remove the crop from a partridge. The crop will have berries, spruce needles and other things inside, but they will be dry. Clean the outside of the crop with warm water. Then there is a neck (like the neck of a balloon) which can be tied with a piece of string. Then take a straw, insert it through the neck of the crop, and blow air into it till it is about the size of a baseball, or a softball. When inflated the crop becomes transparent. Tie the neck of the crop with string and hang it up to dry. Once it dries, it becomes like a maraca.

Millicent spent many happy hours as a child singing, dancing and shaking her homemade maraca.

How to make a duck paw rattle out of webbed feet

Figure 26 Rose Tucker attempts to recreate a duck foot rattle in her kitchen

Figure 27 First, preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Place duck feet on parchment paper on a baking sheet.

Figure 28 Use white navy beans or split yellow peas to insert into the duck's paw.

Figure 29 A few beans will be inserted into the membrane between the ridges of the duck's webbed foot.

Figure 30 Using a small, sharp knife, gently slice down the center of the duck's foot, along the ridge, and carefully insert the beans inside the membranes.

Figure 31 Roast the duck's foot at 325 degrees F for approximately 20-30 minutes and the bottom of the foot will inflate.

Figure 32 An inflated duck's foot with beans inside. The rattle is held by the leg and shaken like a maraca.

[i] To jump from one floating ice-pan to another; COPY, TIPPY. The boys thought they could tabby across the harbour.
[ii] Also pronounced raftering: of sheets of ice, to buckle from the pressure of wind, wave and tide; to override another sheet of ice; to be forced up on the shore.
[iii] A wooden shoulder yoke…a circular wooden device for carrying two pails of water.
[iv] A broom made by whittling slivers at one end of a birch stick in such a manner as to keep them fastened to the stem.
[v] Sent away.
[vi] Thin pieces of kindling wood or 'splits' shaved with a knife so that curls of wood remain attached to the side.
[vii] A standing tree with the bark removed, for use on the 'fish flake,' leaving the peeled tree white; a tree killed as a result of the removal of the bark; any dead tree suitable for fire-wood; rarnpike.
[viii] A thin piece of wood, about twelve to fourteen inches (30-36 cm) long, used chiefly as kindling.
[ix] A long tapering pole, usually a conifer with bark left on, used in constructing roofs, floors, surfaces of stages and flakes; fence rail.
[x] A short heavy-headed nail used to reinforce the soles of boots.
[xi] A temporary shelter, covered with canvas, skins, bark or boughs; LEAN-TO; (b) a small single-roomed hut constructed of vertically placed logs, used seasonally by fishermen, furriers and woodsmen.
[xii] Having pin-feathers. "This bird is 'mootie" meant that the picked bird looked like a man's face that hadn't been shaved for a day or two.
[xiii] To make a sudden, quick gesture or movement; to engage in rough and tumble play.
[xiv] 1 A platform built on poles and spread with boughs or sticks for drying cod-fish on the foreshore; FISH-FLAKE.