

## GREAT NORTHERN PENINSULA



Canada



Newfoundland  
Labrador



# Hay Cove

*A People of Spirit, Courage and Resourcefulness*

## PREFACE

With them the seed of wisdom did I sow  
And with mine own hand laboured it to grow  
And this was all the harvest that I reaped  
“I came like Water, and like Wind I go.”

- *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

What do the people of northern Newfoundland have in common with a poet by the name of Omar Khayyam? At first glance, nothing, except that this obscure piece of Persian poetry captures the essence of what this year-long Community History Project has taught me.

In the past year I ventured into sixteen communities: telephoning, knocking on doors, and sitting at kitchen tables drinking endless cups of tea, trying to learn customs, traditions, and wisdom from the older people in northern Newfoundland so that the stories could be set down in writing and preserved for future generations. *With them the seed of wisdom did I sow...*

Back at the office, after each interview, I would review the outcome of each story and try to write in a format that would satisfy not only the person interviewed, but the people who would read the stories at some future date. *And with my own hand laboured it to grow...*

By year's end there were stacks of photographs, pages of typewritten interviews, maps criss-crossed with names and dates, and hand-drawn pictures submitted by enthusiastic contributors. In people's homes there were interviews where we laughed, cried, walked over hills to the back of land, walked along winding pathways to graveyards, ventured out on the high seas in boats enjoying boil-ups with scalding tea, fisherman's brewis, beans and bread, and still more stories.

In these interviews, I was often perplexed by words and expressions totally unfamiliar to me and, without

the assistance of my husband, Len Tucker, I suspect the dialect would have defeated me utterly. Yet it is the words and expressions of northern Newfoundland that are, and were, the lifeblood of communication in a time when modern technology was unheard of. I learned that, while there are official names on Newfoundland maps, local fishermen have their own names for islands, bays and coves. I learned that the people who settled this wonderful, terrible place have an intimate relationship with the sea and the land that no tourist or outsider can truly fathom or appreciate. And at the end of the year, I knew that I had only managed to collect a few small pieces of the puzzle that make up a larger picture of hardships endured, joys celebrated, and lives lived to the fullest. *And this was all the harvest that I reaped...*

*I came like water and like wind I go...*

This precious generation of people you will read about in these pages were born, lived, and will, one day, pass on. In writing their stories I have attempted to grasp the 'wind and water' of their lives – as well as their customs and traditions – which are fast slipping away into obscurity.

This is not so much a historical document as it is an opportunity for these people – in their own time and in their own way – to tell the stories that were nearest and dearest to their hearts. Whether you are a student, a come from away, or a Newfoundlander, you may find in these pages the heart and soul of the people of Newfoundland.

# Weather Lights and The Brown Man

CARMAN AND MABEL HEDDERSON



Figure 1 Carman and Mabel Hedderson have lived in Hay cove 58 years

*Carm Hedderson was born in 1928. He tells what he knows of the Brown Man, a ghostly figure that emerged around the turn of the century and was most often seen at a place called Muddy Cove, just down over the hill between Hay Cove and L'Anse aux Meadows. Mabel and Carm insist that the tales of the Brown Man are all lies; not to be believed. They are unsure why he was named 'the Brown Man'; Mabel suggests some people said he wore a brown coat. There is speculation that the Brown Man might have been 'invented' to keep people away from certain places, where poachers might be carrying on with their business.*

*Mabel was born March 26, 1935, and was married in the fall of 1950. Together, Carm and Mabel raised seven children. Mabel says she was the oldest child in a family of fourteen children, and three or four of those children were not even born*

*until after she left home.*

## The Brown Man

There are all kinds of stories, but they're all lies anyway. I never met the Brown Man; he disappeared when the roads were made and all the rocks were bulled away. They said he beat up people and everything, but if lies could be told, then Uncle George Decker was the man to tell them, and there were all kinds of older men who could tell you this story, too, but they're all gone now, boy.

## George Decker and the Brown Man

Uncle George Decker got stuck in the snow once. One time he was going down for a load of wood, eh?

They say he had a good team of dogs. Some men heard a big row going on – it was the spring of the

year – and they went out to see what was going on, and here it was Uncle George. His dogs were barking; he had a load of wood on the komatik, and he'd go and lift up the Komatik, then go back and try to get the dogs going. He swore and called the Master down and come down to the foot of the sled, and went back and forth trying to get the dogs and the komatik going.

There were three men watching, see, and they all saw another man at the komatik with Uncle George. Uncle Quil was one of the men that seen him. When Uncle George Decker would go to the nose of the komatik, the other man would go to the back and hold on, so it wouldn't move, and so it went. Uncle George couldn't see anybody, but the men could, —and they could hear him swearing! By-and-by the brown man left and walked on to Muddy Cove.

Later, Uncle Quil said, "Uncle George, who were you rowing with this morning?"

"Nobody, boy," he said.

"Oh, yes, sir," he said. "You were rowing with somebody; we seen the man."

When Uncle George denied it again, Uncle Quil said, "Well, boy, there were three of us watching you."

Uncle George Decker thought his sled was stuck in the snow, but that's not what the other men saw; they saw a man playing games with Uncle George.

But 'twasn't in my day, eh?





Figure 2 Fishing Premises at Hay Cove 1966, courtesy of Carm Hedderson

### Weather lights

In the morning, I used to go gunning. Up in the bay there was a rock formation called the Chimney. In the fall of the year, when there'd be a big storm on, we used to see weather lights and that's where we would see the light; it would be moving up along the shore. It most always happened in the fall of the year; you wouldn't see it in the spring, summer, or winter.

I got up one morning to go gunning for ducks and the light passed right on alongside of me, just before daylight. First the light went this

way, then it went that way, and when it passed alongside of me I saw right through it; it was about the size of a gallon can and shaped like a balloon. Sometimes the light would be ten feet off the water and then come down to the land again. The light would go up along the shore and trim around every bottom.

Now, my father's generation was always seeing spirits. They were either scared themselves, or they wanted to make other people scared. I think they made up the stories to keep people away from certain places. Some men, if they were poaching salmon, used flash-

lights, swinging them in circles, or back and forth, to frighten people away. Or sometimes they'd make queer noises to frighten people off, because if they caught you poaching some people would tell on you. The next day, you'd hear someone say they saw 'spirits' up at the graveyard.

### Ducks

I used to love hunting ducks. My dear, more than once we had a feed of bird before we went to bed. I'd come home in the night and Mabel would have a turn of birds picked and ready to put in the oven.

## Feather pillows and mattresses

*Families back then used to keep the feathers and make pillows and mattresses. They'd pluck the ducks and keep the feathers in a bag till they were dry, and when they had enough feathers, they'd make pillows and mattresses, but they were always adding new feathers to old bedding anyway. The feather beds were warm and soft, and to make the bed, they'd get up in the morning and shake the mattresses to fluff them up. There were no manufactured mattresses available back then, everyone made their own. It took a lot of duck feathers and a lot of work to put a feather bed together. Carm and Mabel Hedderston say the old feather beds were comfortable. "There were no bad backs then, maid. Not with feathers."*

People don't make feather beds anymore because they don't get

enough birds. Back then there was no limit on the number of birds that could be hunted. Now there is. And, back then, families were larger and ate a great number of birds, so there were more feathers available.

## Retirement from Parks Canada

I gave up fishing in 1972. I went to work for Parks Canada and worked with them twenty-three years; maintenance, outdoor and indoor. It started off as seasonal employment but in the last years I worked right on through. I liked that kind of work; if I seen anyone coming in the nighttime or after hours, they'd come to me; even when the park was closed and tourist season had ended, they'd show up and I'd show them around. I met people from all over the world, rich and poor, and I heard many different languages spoken. I

was sixty-five when I gave it up. I had cancer, see, and had to have an operation and I was sick for awhile. I could have kept working, but I was ready to retire then, and that's what I did.

## Glossary Dictionary of Newfoundland English

1. Row, Rowing: a verbal argument

2. Weather Lights: Gleam or flicker of light at sea thought to presage a storm. When you can see (weather) lights on the salt water at night, it is a sign of a storm coming. The lights start at the bottom of the riggings and move gradually up to the top where they disappear.

3. Turn of birds: Turn: a load, especially as much (wood, water, birds) as can be carried by a person at one time.



Figure 3 Carm Hedderston was presented with this David Blackwood print on the occasion of his retirement from Parks Canada.