

Midwifery

Annie Pilgrim, Midwife
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Contributed by William Quinton
Bartlett, St. Lunaire-Griquet

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Figure 1 Annie Pilgrim

Annie Pilgrim of Griquet on the Northern Peninsula was a midwife for 50 years and delivered approximately 1,200 babies.

In this article, she tells her story.

"I was 91 years old October 22. I was born in Quirpon but moved to Griquet when I was married 70 years ago. I had seven children, 3 girls and 4 boys. My oldest one is 69, and the baby is 54 years old. One of my sons had 15 children and I delivered every one of them. I also delivered 14 of my daughter's children, 12 for another one and 7 for one of my boys.

"I had a good life in Quirpon when I was a teenager. Every Sunday morning we would go to church with our Daddy. We used to go to dances some nights and some nights we would go to prayers. We used to have the old fashion square

dance and the eight handed reel. The Americans used to dance to that one. Also there was the six handed reel.

"We didn't have any roads in Quirpon. It was better then than it is now, because you were sure that when you went out on the roads, no cars were going to run you down. The old days were ten times better than they are now.

"My father was an Englishman. He came from Harbour Grace to Quirpon to get married. I went fishing with my father for six or seven years. We used to fish cod with a jigger and a trawl. I used to steer the boat and catch the fish with the jigger and the hand line. I liked fishing. But it was tiresome. Some mornings we would get up with the stars in the sky. We used to get lots of salmon fishing. The Americans used to come for the salmon then.

"Frenchmen were around when I was a girl, and I was afraid of them because they were so ugly and they would fight among themselves. They didn't have any women with them. They would come from France in the spring and leave in the fall. They had their own ship. They used to wear wooden boots. I remember they used to use sculpin in their soup. I used to eat that also.

"After I got married, I used to work in the gardens and lug fish back and forth on the flake. We worked like dogs. We used to also pick berries. And I used to spin and malt. I spun hundreds of pounds of wool.

"I was a midwife for about 50 years. I delivered about 1,200 children altogether. I delivered triplets and just when the doctor was coming in the house it was all over. He was bad enough to send in and say that he delivered three babies in the hospital, but that was a lie.

"The triplets I delivered were small, one was 1 lb. 2 ounces and he is living now. One is married. The other one died when it was seven months old. There wasn't any milk so I went to a woman who had a baby the night before and got a drop of milk from her breast to feed the triplets. They said I was really smart to think of that. I delivered six twins.

"I went outside of Quirpon to deliver babies; I went to Western Head and Lance Aux Meadows. They used to come after me on dog teams. When there was no snow, I used to go on boats. I went one night and it was so bad that they had to put me in the bottom of the boat and put coats over me. I saw many rough times.

"I remember one morning when I was about 70 years old. I saw a man coming and he said that he wanted me to go to Cape Bauld. There was a sea on. When we got part way, he got a bigger boat and we went to Quirpon. Then we got another bigger boat. Just before we got to Cape Bauld he asked me to go up over the cliff on a ladder; there was mountains of sea. The first time I never got there, but the second time I grabbed a man by the neck and I wasn't a bit afraid. When I got there the woman was already in labour. Twenty minutes after I got there, her 8 lb. baby boy was born. I had to climb back down over the ladder. After I got down and in the boat I got seasick. The next morning I came home safe and sound. I was charging 10 dollars then but he gave me twenty five.

"I was called three o'clock in the morning in a snow storm. People had come to get me on a dog team. I had to go down the arm. The girl had hardly anything on. Then the baby came and I didn't have a thing to put on her, so I pinned it up in flour sack. I took off one of my slips and gave it to the woman to put on. I went to get her something to eat and there wasn't a thing in her house. I went to another house and got something for her to eat. When I came home, I went around to my friends and got a bit of clothes from each of them and carried them down to her. I never got paid for that, I didn't care as long as she was well.

"I went to one house one time and I was having a cup of tea on a table and the hens were on the other end.

"I went to Quirpon one time to a woman. They said the baby couldn't be born because she had two by a Caesarian birth. The midwife they had went away and left her. Everyone thought she was going to die, but the baby came, 11 lbs. and so many ounces. I was happy then.

"I lost one mother but I didn't lose very many babies. I can't remember ever losing one. The mother I lost was supposed to have been in the hospital. But the doctor said that if she had been in the hospital, she would have died all the same. The baby was born, but the woman died. She wouldn't go to the hospital.

"More than once I had to crawl under the stove to warm my feet after I delivered the baby. I would stay with the mother for a couple of days and I would visit her for nine days. If I had to go somewhere else, I would have someone else look after her. I had some rough times.

"My children were born home, by an old woman who was as good as a doctor. When she stepped out, I stepped in. One night they came for me and I went and I never stopped after that. I was 82 years old when I borne my last baby. I borne one with my arm broke, with my left hand. I am pleased with the way I was a midwife.

"If I had my life to live over again I would live it the same way.

If someone wanted a midwife now and they couldn't get to a doctor, then I would go and borne the baby. I am sure that I can do that now.

"My health isn't as good as it was. I've had the flu. But outside all of that, I don't have any illnesses. I don't do housework, but I do a lot of knitting.

"I don't know why I lived so long and my health is as good as it is. It may be because of all the good I did for people. I send all my thanks to God for living so long. I am a very religious woman, but I don't care which church it is. I'm not a bit scared of dying.

"I would like to tell you about the time I was asked to make a speech to Lieutenant Governor Harnum. I didn't make a speech before but I did the best I could. I went into the Pentecostal School here in St. Leonard's. I got up and made my speech and then the Governor came along and told me I was the best woman in the church."