

## GREAT NORTHERN PENINSULA



Canada



Newfoundland  
Labrador



# North Boat Harbour

*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.



Figure 1 Entrance to North Boat Harbour

*Tamsey Laing, nee Woodward, lives at the far end of the community of North Boat Harbour. As a small child a wrecked plane – a symbol of the second Great War and its destructive power – was only a playhouse to Tamsey and the children of North Boat Harbour.*

*Mrs. Laing looks back and reflects on what life was like growing up in North Boat Harbour:*

### **World War II at their doorstep**

*If you stand on the back step of Tamsey Laing's house, there is a marsh that extends away into the distance, and it's a peaceful place: birds are singing, the wind whispers in the long grass and, off to the right, the waves on a nearby pond are purest, deepest blue. But the marsh is deceptive; at first glance it appears to be an open meadow bisected by a clothesline attached to a distant pole. But if you look closer you will see, lying in the deep*

*grass, an incongruous piece of twisted metal, the battered remains of the wing of an airplane, a forgotten relic of a past war.*

*In 1942 Canada was at war, and when a military aircraft flew low over Boat Harbour, apparently out of fuel or off course, people looked to the skies, and waited. The pilot attempted a landing on what he*

*supposed was a meadow, the plane touched down, the wheels dug in and the aircraft pitched head over heels, breaking into pieces and gouging a deep trench in the marsh.*

*Some people say the plane was American; others say it was British; but time has obscured the truth. The local men, not knowing if the crew would be friend or foe, were*

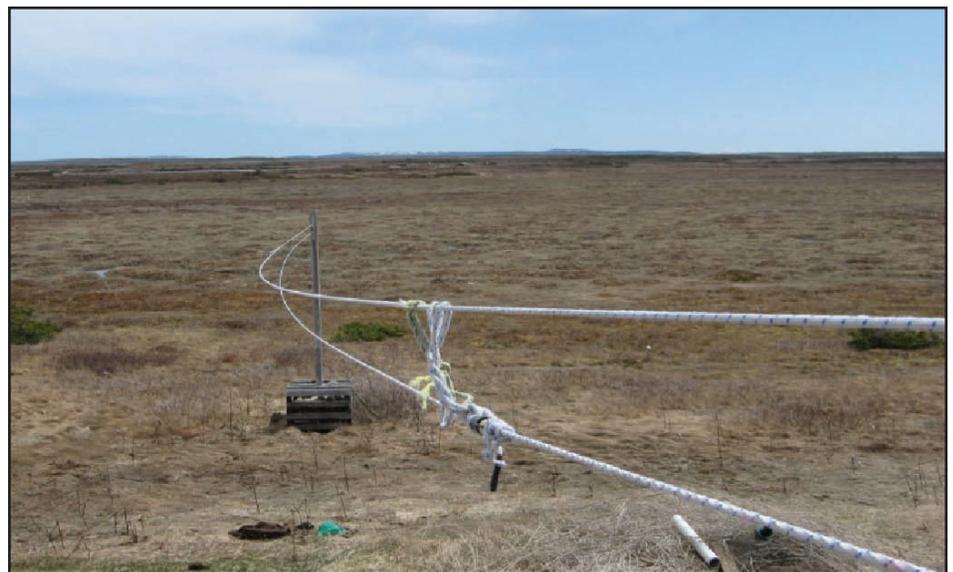


Figure 2 The marsh at Tamsey's back doorstep

*armed with rifles when they ventured out to the wreck, unsure what they might face when they approached the downed plane. For all they knew, the pilot and co-pilot might do them harm.*

*Although this event happened a*

*even then, that the plane was 'lost', especially considering there was a navigator on board; some speculated they were on a reconnaissance mission. But, whether the aircraft and crew were lost or not, they were injured and needed care.*



Figure 3 All that remains of a military aircraft that crashed in 1942

*year before Tamsey Woodward was born, much of the story of the crash has been passed down from grandparents to parents to children and children's children in Boat Harbour. Tamsey repeats a story she heard many times growing up. "The war was on and it was fought right here in the Straits; you could see it from the houses at nighttime. They was torpedoing the boats and everything."*

*There were two crewmen on board the crippled aircraft – the pilot and the navigator – who claimed to be lost and possibly out of fuel, and the plane hadn't caught fire, which supported the pilot's statement that it was out of fuel and was forced to make an emergency landing. Tamsey suggests that there was some doubt in the community,*

*"Aunt Vicky was home at the time, I think she was the one who wrapped up their wounds, but it was my grandmother who tended to them. I don't think they had many bones broke though," says Tamsey. A short while after, the people of Boat Harbour accompanied the two men over to the school and showed them, on the globe, where they were.*

*It would be some time before the wreckage would be salvaged, but the plane contained much more than its two occupants; it contained military cargo that would be placed under heavy guard until the proper military authorities would come to claim it.*

## Storing secrets

My grandfather, Thomas Woodward, had a storage shed that served in the summer as a kitchen for himself and his family and his sharemen. In the summer, the shed had a stove and everything my grandmother needed to cook with. In winter, it was used as a place to store wood, water, and barrels, and this is where they stored the cargo that was taken off the plane.

People here, they had to watch over the military cargo and nobody was allowed in there: even the ones that guarded it didn't know what was in that shed. My mom's brother, Garfield, says he was one of a number of boys that were paid to watch the supplies after the crash, and he said they didn't get paid very much, but he was only a young boy at the time, so I suppose that's why they didn't pay him much.

Later, the military came to Boat Harbour in float planes and picked up the cargo. Uncle Garfield told me there were no wharves they could come into on account of the depth of the water, so they made rafts from 45-gallon drums and put the supplies on the raft and floated it out to the planes. I don't know how many trips they made back and forth.

## Copy house

I can remember playing in what I called the tail part of the airplane; what is commonly called the fuselage; it was about twenty-five or thirty feet long; a nice length anyway. My grandfather hauled it down behind the two-story house we used to live in. I don't know

how he hauled it; perhaps he did it in the fall with a dog team. But anyway, we used to play in it; we used it as a copy house (play house). There were always two or three kids playing in the copy house until it was time to go home or someone got too contrary to play with. Inside the fuselage there were compartments; you had a job to get through; you had to be pretty small.

We was only small kids then, six or seven years old. If it was raining, we'd take all our stuff and go out there and play house. We'd get a meal for our children – dolls was our children – lots of times the younger kids would be children, too. We'd eat with little plates and cups, you know, those small ones they used to have. Or perhaps the doctor would give them needles. Games like that.

I think somebody eventually came and got the fuselage for scrap. It was made of white metal – it never rusted – aluminum, I think. People got the bolts and made rings out of them. There are two rings in Boat Harbour that I know of – Paul Woodward got one, and I think Trevor Woodward got one that his grandfather made.

### Empire energy, Big Brook

There was a boat in Big Brook, the Empire Energy – she was full of corn. It sat there for years and years. Grandfather had a machine – it's almost like the old-fashioned meat grinders people used to have – and he used to grind the corn and make meal out of it, and then they'd cook it for the dogs. People came from as far away as Ship Cove and

Quirpon in their boats, up to that wreck, to collect the corn; it was there for a long time. It was common for cornmeal to be used for dogs, and I ground a lot of corn back then.

### First settlers at Boat Harbour

The first settlers in this area were the Bradburys, but they weren't exactly settlers because they used to go into Stag Lead wintertime, where they had a winter house. Summertime they used to come here and fish. My mom and dad were Lambert and Clara Woodward; my mom was a Woodward, too. My mom and my Aunt Blanche Woodward were sisters, and they married two brothers. I

his family here in Boat Harbour; I married his son, Curling.

### Growing up in Boat Harbour

I was only fourteen months old when my mother died of tuberculosis. I was the only child, and lived with my dad, and my dad always lived with his mom and dad. He remarried when I was in my late teens. The lady he married was a widow – a Fields in Cook's Harbour – and she had three children by her first husband. Together, they had two more children, so I have two half-sisters.

Emma Jean Decker of Wild Bight was actually my grandmother, but growing up I called her Mom because she reared me up.



Figure 4 the Woodward family tree can be found in St. Mark's church

was born September 8, 1943.

Norman Laing came down to St. John's Bay lobster fishing; he was from Norris Point, Bonne Bay. Later, he came to Boat Harbour as a shareman. He married and raised

The house my grandparents lived in is no longer standing. They had a two-story house with six bedrooms upstairs and a big, wide hall.

The way it was, my mom, she went in at the fish, too; she was one



Figure 5 a snapshot of North Boat Harbour

of the salters. If she had a small child, she took the child down to the stage in a crib, and that's where the child had to stay. When they'd go in the boat to haul the trap again, my mom would go up to the house and cook meals for the sharemen, and she'd serve the meals in a place separate from the house. The sharemen ate out in this place because, the way it was, she never had time to keep her house clean for when anybody come, but, now, this place was always tidy.

Most of the people my mom cooked for were sharemen; they worked for grandfather. They lived in the community, but they'd eat breakfast, dinner and supper to the house, then they'd go home nighttime and go to bed. Most everybody in those days had a separate place for eating; this is why she always had the outdoor kitchen, because the main part of her house wasn't used, only for Sundays or when somebody came to visit. She always looked after the doctors and the ministers and the nurses and the Mounties – Rangers they was

called at one time.

She always left time enough to get the meals cooked, but the meals they cooked most of the time was fish and potatoes.

### **Canvas mats**

They used to have what we called canvas mats and they was the prettiest things ever you seen, all kinds of roses; you could buy them at the store. They was about four foot long and about two and a half wide and she used to have seven or eight of them over her floor. Every Friday I used to scrub them and put them in under the settle; some people would call the settle a day bed. Saturday evening – the floor was cleaned Saturday – all those mats was took out and put on the floor for Sunday. The main floor was also of canvas, but it was wore out, so the mats covered up the wear and tear, and they looked very nice.

## **Kids worked too**

### **Cutthroats**

Lots of times grandfather used to split the fish, then leave it and perhaps he might leave a man in to help salt it. Myself and Una used to always go in stage cutting throat. I was only eleven years old when I did that. When we were kids we hardly had time to go playing. First year I went in the stage, I went in by myself; Una had to stay home and cook. Her father and our mother used to work at the fish, too, and she might have been nine or ten then.

### **Making bread**

I wasn't very old when I had to take my turn mixing bread before going to school, and my aunt would come down and mix it over. And when I come home dinnertime, then I put it on. She might put one lot in the oven for me; it was a wood-stove then, and I'd have to go pick up the chips and get the stove going; I had to do it because my mom had crippling arthritis. I started doing a lot of things at an early age because I done it for to help her. I can remember my mom used to send me to my Aunt Blanche's house if she ran out of something: baking powder, a bit of salt or flour. And she used to say, "And look, don't you stop, will you? And if you falls down, don't stop to get up!"



Figure 6 This wall hanging was made by the ladies of North Boat Harbour

### Wood and water

We was only kids, but we had work to do. Our job was bringing in the wood, and water in the summertime with a hoop. We used to have to walk to the spring, from here across a bog, and go to a waterhole and bring water. They had shallow wells in the summertime for washing clothes, what you call water for doing things, not for drinking. But to this well you had to go, and Sunday morning you had to keep the barrel full, there used to be a big barrel outdoors in the summertime, but in the wintertime it had to be in the porch. In the wintertime, we had a little komatik, and we'd put the barrel on it, then we'd pull that over and get the water – that was after school in the evenings. And we'd come back and throw it in another barrel. We had to make two or three trips like that, every evening. Bring in wood, and

lots of times we helped grandfather saw it up with a bucksaw.

### Work and marriage

When I finished school, I went to St. Anthony and worked three years. I started work June 1961 at the A.H. Murray Store; Mr. Nat Chater from Bonavista Bay used to run it. There was all kinds of stuff

in the store: hardware, salt, dry goods, fishing gear, groceries. A lot of people used to come and buy their foods and at the end of every month they used to pay for it.

In June 1964, I left to come home, married Curling, and that's where I've been ever since. As well as my oldest son, Dan, I have two daughters, Charmaine and Angela. To tell you the truth, maid, I worked at everything because my husband fished part time. He worked with the Department of Highways for awhile, then got a long liner and went fishing on his own.

In 1976 I started working in the fish plant at Cook's Harbour, and I did bookwork at the store, and I looked after me family besides that. In the morning I'd have to get up at 5:00 to milk the cows, and at midnight, when everyone else was gone to bed I was out milking the cows again. That's the way it worked.

When I was in the stage at the fish, I was a cutthroater. Lots of times when I was working I lugged my two girls around. First, when they was small, I used to take them in the morning and stick them in the fish; they had all kinds of winter clothes on. Then perhaps they'd go



Figure 7  
St. Mark's  
Anglican Church

up to my grandmother's, and when the fish was all done and the fishermen had to go to the traps again, I'd come home with the kids and feed them.

I done the bit of work I could do – and lots of times it wasn't done – but that was the way life was in those days.

### **A way of life**

The above wall hanging depicts a way of life in Boat Harbour. There is a picture of a stage and wharf, a motorboat with an old Acadia engine, a fisherman mending nets, and a killick.

### **St. Mark's Anglican Church**

Tamsey explains that the communion rail, chalice, candleholders, and lecterns are from the church in Ireland Bight. The pews, pulpit and altar are from the Waterford Hospital in St. John's.

