

Cook's Harbour



Garfield Warren
Cook's Harbour
--Photos by Kathleen Tucker--



Caleb Warren's old fish store. Caleb and Harrison Warren were brothers

Born and raised a fisherman

Garfield Warren was born in March 1941 and he and his wife Morvada (Ada) live in Cook's Harbour. His father, Harrison, and his grandfather, Isaac, were fishermen. Garfield remembers that many times they brought in such a load of fish that water was washing up through the ⁱthole pins.

One summer they brought in 1000 ⁱⁱquintals of hard, dry ⁱⁱⁱshore fish, plus they had 200-300 quintals of ^{iv}Labrador fish. That was considered a good summer. The Warrens had a crew of nine men and two trap skiffs, with a ^vrodney towed behind. The two boats fished at the same time and came in together and put away the fish. If they caught enough fish to fill a ^{vi}cod bag, they left that until the last.



Garfield Warren, in his living room, demonstrates how a cod trap was set up

An unpredictable fishery

But of the fishery, Warren observes, “There were a lot of fish; but there was no money in it, see? One year before I was old enough to go fishing with Father, he had a crew of eight or nine men, and all they had that year was 80 quintals of fish. The following year he had a crew of six, and that’s when she struck (meaning a large number of fish). Then he couldn’t find a crew fast enough to bring in all the fish.”

Fishermen had their draw system and their designated trap berths, but sometimes fishermen set trap berths in other areas, which was perfectly acceptable if those berths were not already taken. So, later in the fishing season the Warrens might go over to Swile Rocks, near Raleigh, to put down their traps, but those berths were not part of the Cook’s Harbour Draw System.

When he refers to a local place called Sculpin Cove, he jokes that the sculpin fish had the jaws like Mussolini.

Motoring in his boat through Green Island Tickle long ago, Warren remembers there was so much capelin that the blades of his boat were rolling over them. “Now,” he says, “there’s n’er capelin to be found.”

Fish had to be made before midnight on Saturday

Fishermen never took more than a boat load on a Saturday night. When a boat was fully loaded and the fishermen came in after dark, Garfield remembers they could tell if the boat was loaded by the sound it made in the water. If the fishermen checked their nets and they were overfull, they had to turn the fish out because they couldn’t process fish on a Sunday. “And,” he says, “Everybody was alike in that matter.”

Then, the fish had to be ^{vii}made before 12 midnight, and everything washed down.

Local Names

- Bonne Bay on the map is called Back Cove by local fishers.
- Cook's Point on the map is called Fishing Point by local fishers.



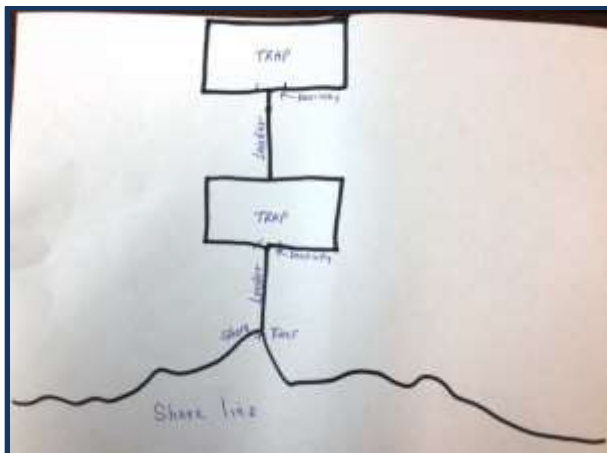
Harrison Warren's fish store and twine loft

How names were twisted...

There is a trap berth called Swinoss: nobody knows how the name originated, but in a 1980s publication by Fisheries, 'Swinoss' was called Swim Horse.

There were names such as Inja Harbour or Inja Pond at Cook's Harbour, which likely originated from the word Indian (Fishermen had a way of shaving off the beginnings and the endings of words)

Illustration of an Offer Tier Berth



Sketch of an offer tier berth by Leonard Tucker

Reuben Elliott Cook's Harbour



The community of Cook's Harbour in the 1940s. Photo contributed by Alf Larkin.

Reuben Elliott was born in 1927. His father was a hook and line fisherman, and by the time Reuben got himself a trap, the Draw System was already in effect. Reuben had two traps, but there were few berths, so there was only one draw for a trap berth in Cook's Harbour. A second trap could be set anywhere the fish might be running.

The Elliott's crew consisted of Reuben's father Erastus 'Ras' Elliott, his brother William 'Bill' Elliott, and Reuben 'Rube' Elliott. They also hired a shareman.

Local Names

Older fishermen referred to Pistolet Bay as 'out in the bay'.

Setting limits on trap berths

Jim Fields had a bigger operation, and it was more or less established that he had a certain fishing area, and if someone else took it, they became 'bad friends', at least for that year.

In Reuben's memory, a good summer for their crew was 400 quintals; all shore fish, which meant it was dried and shipped in the fall. According to Reuben, the summers were better in the old days for drying fish. 'In these last few years,' he says, 'you wouldn't be able to dry fish.'

When Erastus and his crew dried their fish, they didn't use flakes. They dried their fish on the barrens, or on the rocks along the beach.

Other than the fishery, Reuben also worked in the woods at Main Brook and in Goose Bay, Labrador. He fished in the summer, finishing around October; then he'd strike out for Main Brook to work in the woods. He took the coastal boat to Main Brook, but usually walked back in the spring, before the coastal boat sailed.

Frank & Ruby Elliott
Cook's Harbour
--Photos by Kathleen Tucker



Frank Elliott of Cook's Harbour holds a photograph of his grandfather's house.



A cropped photograph of Tom Elliott's house in Raleigh. Tom was Frank Elliott's grandfather. On the left, Uncle Sim Elliott's house; on the right, Uncle Will Elliott's (Ches Elliott's father) house. Located where Roy Elliott's shop is today. The Elliotts were fishermen and merchants.

Photo Essay
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--by Kathleen Tucker



Figure 1 The old Methodist Church at Cook's Harbour has aged gracefully over the years



Figure 2 One fisherman's appreciation for vivid colours...



Figure 3 “A good day on clothes”



Figure 4 Laundry pinned to the clothesline on a breezy summer day.



Figure 2 Dory behind Reuben Elliott's home in Cook's Harbour.

Trap Berths at Cook's Harbour

1. Sculpin Cove. Prime.
2. Back Cove. In the draw...uncertain whether it was prime or second draw.
3. Fishing Point. Prime. A second berth was called the ¹Offer Tier at Fishing Point.
4. ¹Cronnick Cove.
5. Inside Cronnick Cove.
6. Harbour Rock Shoal. Prime.
7. White Rock (the rock is actually white). Second draw.
8. Charlie's ¹Tickle. Prime. Garfield remembers this berth particularly because the live rocks on the sea bed were hard on the nets.
9. Tickle Rock. Prime. Always big fish caught here.
10. Southwest Point on Green Island. Prime. Always a good berth and always small fish caught here. Note: Tickle Rock and Southwest Point berths were 80 fathoms apart; one had only small fish and the other, only large.
11. Middle of Green Island. Prime.
12. Offer Tier, or Second Tier on Green Island. An offer berth or second tier was a second trap set off from the first trap and this kind of berth was included in the draw.
13. Peter Ricks' Berth (he was the skipper on a schooner). Prime.
14. Trap Hole. Prime. This was a rough berth in bad weather. The first time his father allowed him to go out in the boat with the men, it was to haul a trap at this berth. All big fish at this berth.
15. Offer Tier (second tier) on the back of Peter Ricks' Berth.
16. Eight Square Trap. Garfield's father told him that Jim Field introduced the 8-square trap (located back of Southwest Point. #10 Berth). Field's trap had eight sides and was original. Fishermen said the eight square cod trap was easier to haul than the traditional trap.
17. Offer Tier Berth at Tickle Rock. Prime.
18. Capelin Cove. Draw.
19. Black Rock.
20. Swinoss (Swim Horse).
21. Harrison Warren's Berth (beside #12 & #16). It was an offer tier berth, and a deep water berth.



Figure 3 Cook's Harbour nautical chart

ⁱ Thole Pins: Thole or wooden peg, often used in pairs, set vertically in the gunwale of a boat and serving as fulcrum for an oar which is usually secured to it by a 'withe' or thong formed by a flexible branch, rope or leather strap.

ⁱⁱ Quintal: 112 pounds.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shore fish: shore cure (d fish): cod-fish prepared for market with light application of salt and extended drying period.

^{iv} Labrador fish: a variety of heavily salted, semi-dried cod produced in the Labrador fishery; often attributed with designations of 'cure' or grade.

^v Rodney: a small round-bottomed boat with square stern, used chiefly as a tender; a small 'punt'.

^{vi} Cod-bag: A large net in the shape of a mesh bag in which extra cod were stored until the fishermen could process it.

^{vii} Making fish: The process of preserving fish by salting and drying; CURING.