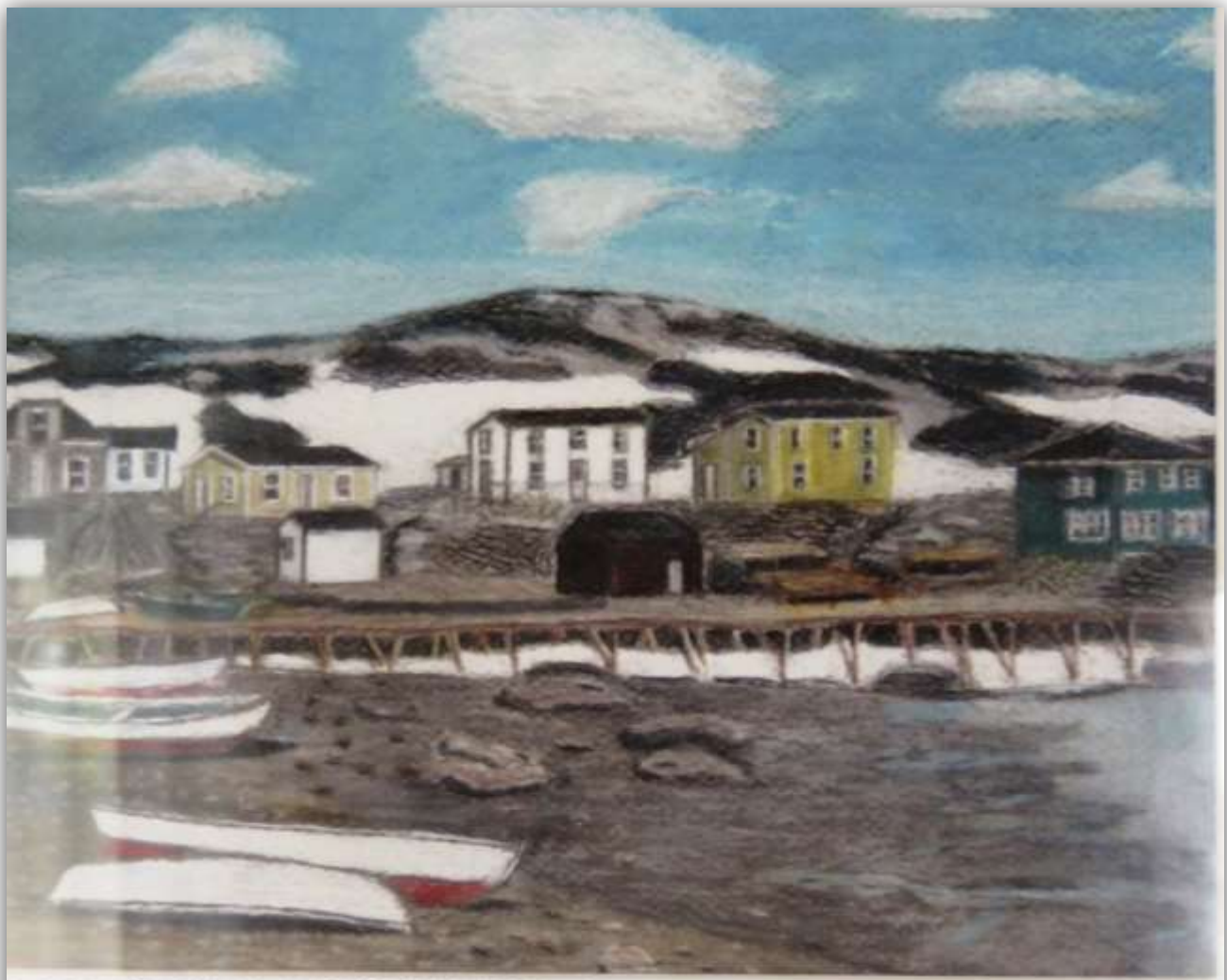


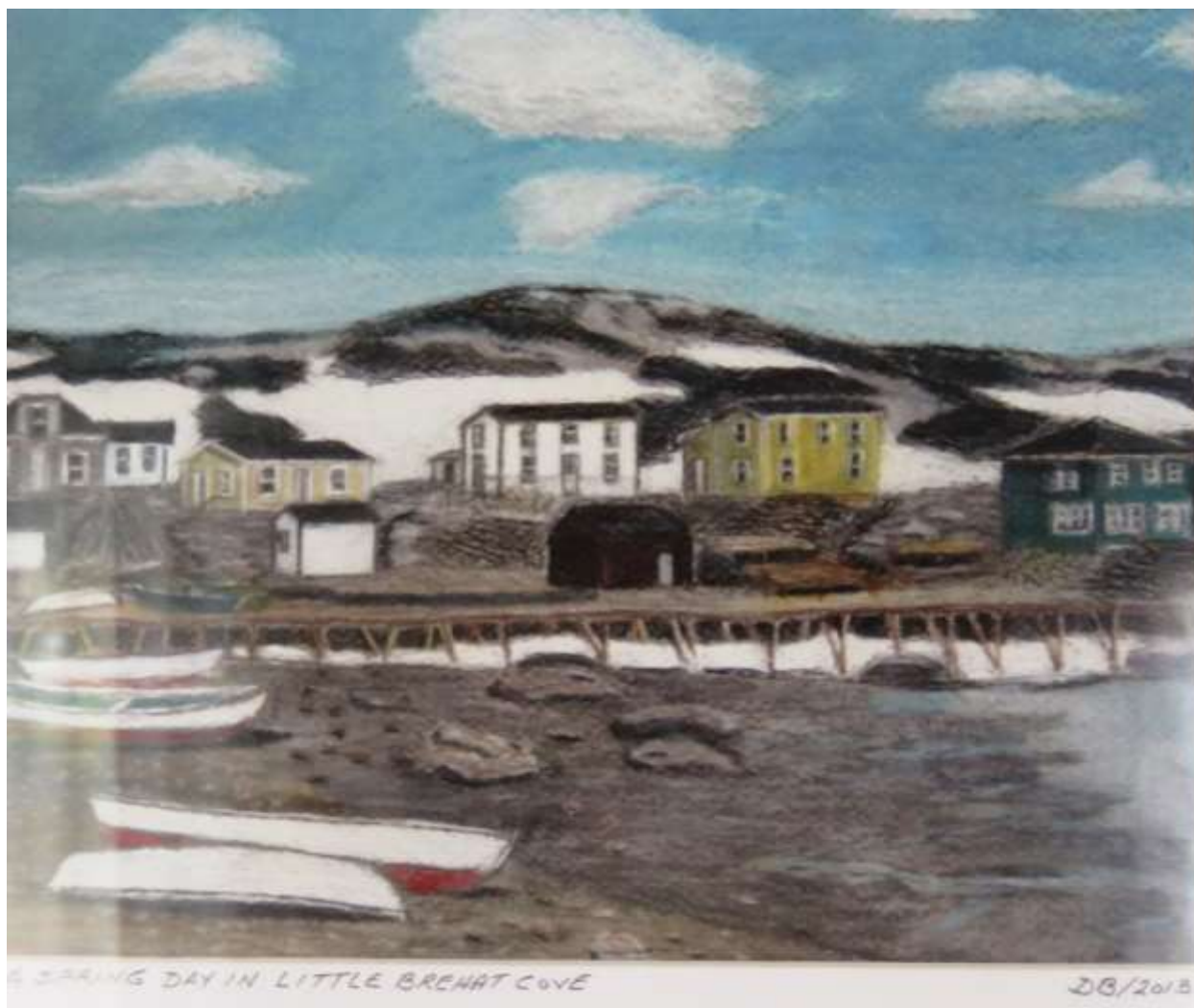
Little Brehat



A SPRING DAY IN LITTLE BREHAT COVE

DB/2013

Melvin Pilgrim Little Brehat



A Spring Day in Little Brehat, a painting.

The Resettlement of Little Brehat

Melvin Pilgrim was born in 1938 and grew to adulthood in the fishing community of Little Brehat. As a young boy he was reared up on stories told by the older men in his community; stories of peril, rescue and derring-do. These stories would be told down at the stage, at the loft, or around a winter's fire in the kitchen, often over a late night lunch (which was common then, but now is a thing of the past).

One fall night a storm and heavy seas rolled in, destroying wharves, stages and other infrastructure along the coastline, thus changing their lives forever. Little Brehat was resettled in the late 1950s as a result of that storm so, like many others, Melvin and his wife, Ivy, moved to St. Anthony and settled there.

Of the resettlement of Little Brehat, he recalls, “We moved out of Little Brehat in 1959. The Pilgrims and the Richards were the last to leave. Before resettlement, the people of Little Brehat knew what they were going at...they were going fishing; it was as simple as that. In the fall of the year we’d go down to Fred Bussey’s and pick up our supplies for the winter. That was our life.”



Melvin & Ivy Pilgrim on their wedding day, and in later years

But it was the storm that finally drove people away from the community of Little Brehat. “I can mind about that storm; it happened early in the fall, because all the boats were still on the ⁱcollar. I was about 16 then. The storm came on in the night and hit hard. My father had two or three ⁱⁱstores...a fish store and a twine store. After the storm, we couldn’t get to the stores...we had to trim along the hills. And when the sea rolled in—there were two sides to the harbour—it rolled in on the Richards’ side, and the waves were so high you couldn’t see their houses, and the turf on top of the hill was torn away.”

Melvin remembers that during the big storm, they stood on top of their ⁱⁱⁱflakes and couldn’t see the lights of the Richards’ dwellings on the other side of the harbour...that’s how high the waves were. That night the sea took the wharves, the stages, the stores...everything. And the boats—like so much kindling— were tossed onto the beach.

“We had our cod liver oil in 45-gallon steel drums, ready for shipping; all that was washed off the wharfs and ended up in the coves everywhere. And there was a feller had a little business; he had stuff stored in a little store; all that washed out in the cove...all kinds of tinned stuff.”

After that, when things settled down, people started leaving the community.

Main Fishing Families

The Pilgrims: Bram, Hedley (Melvin’s father), and Harrison Pilgrim (three brothers), and nephews Spurgeon (Spurge) and George.

Richard (Dickie) Richards and sons: Mac, Abe and David.

The Colbournes: but they generally fished with hook & line; only at the end did they fish with a trap.

The Budgells: only three Budgells trap-fished (the younger generation went to school and found employment elsewhere): George Budgell, Ray Budgell and Eugene (called 'Uge') Budgell. According to Melvin, they got a lot of fish for three men. 'They worked hard at it, and they had good traps. George Budgell could knit a trap with his eyes shut,' recalls Melvin.



A common sight in most fishing villages during the fishery; the fishermen would come home and take a quick nap on the day bed in the kitchen.

Draw System

One year Magistrate Wells came to Brehat and set up the Draw System, but that first year there was no other man to ensure fair play when the Magistrate drew the skippers' names, so the fishermen of Little Brehat were not really sure if the draw was fair that year. In subsequent years, says Melvin, there was always a second man to verify the draw, and the most desired berth in that community was Black Rock Cove.

A good summer's catch

“One summer we went back fishing to Little Brehat; we caught 1300^{iv} quintals of fish, and the Richards’ caught 1100. I tell you what we had; we had 1298 quintals of fish, but Fred Bussey said, ‘we’ll square it off and call it 1300.’ Of the 1300 quintals, 650 was, according to Melvin, ‘dried hard enough to chop the head off the devil’ (in other words, the drier the fish, the better).

“We used to pull up one^v trap, come up here and get ten^{vi} hogsheads of salt in a 30’ boat—and we had a nine-mile steam to get the salt, because there was a shortage of salt that year. We had to go to St. Anthony to the Plant to offload fresh fish and pick up a load of salt. One time we went to the Plant and everything was blocked solid; we had to wait the whole blessed day. Our intention was to get clear of the fish and get a load of salt, and come back home. We spent the whole day there, waiting to offload the fish, and never did get the salt because we waited too long. They were tough times, b’y.”

When the ice came in

“Mom died in 1957—that’s the year the ice was in. And on the 12th day of July; that was the first fish we were able to pull in that year.”

Uncommon words

Dirty water was called^{vii} slub, which was slimy. Fish wouldn’t swim in slub, which was like a gel.

‘From the Wash Balls to Needle’s Point, the water was perfectly clean, and there were thousands of fish. But in some places the water was dirty, and there were no fish to be caught,’ remembers Melvin.

The flakes on the Pilgrim’s side of the harbour were high enough that there were steps leading up, with rails, to the top of the flake. According to Melvin, the flakes were high enough that a man didn’t have to^{viii} crump down to walk beneath them.

A^{ix} draft of fish: as much dried fish as you could get on a hand bar; or two quintals of fish.

Trap Berths

1. Tumber Island upper side—towards St. Anthony (also called ‘The Tumps’). Fished by the Richards family. Melvin says, “They mostly set their traps in 15 fathoms of water, and they got a nice bit of fish. Our fellows used Black Rock Cove, which was on the back of Tumber Island. That was before the Draw System.

“One year, the Richards’s went out to take Black Rock Cove, and they got ahead of our crowd, but they never got a blessed thing there. Dickie Richards called it ‘The Garden’. It was a fine place for fish, but a rough and^x tidey spot. But they didn’t mind; they were after fish.

“They left their moorings out that fall. My first cousin, Don Pilgrim, was fishing by himself with hook & line. He went out and hooked up on the moorings and caught a load of fish. He called me and said, ‘B’y, take the trap and put it out.’

So our skipper asked Dickie Richards if he could put a trap out there at the Richards’s moorings (that was before my day; I wasn’t fishing then).

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Go ahead.’

And they trapped 300 quintals...the biggest kind of catch.

The next summer the Richards took Black Rock Cove again, and our crowd had Tumber Island. They had their nets out as far as 21 fathoms of water.

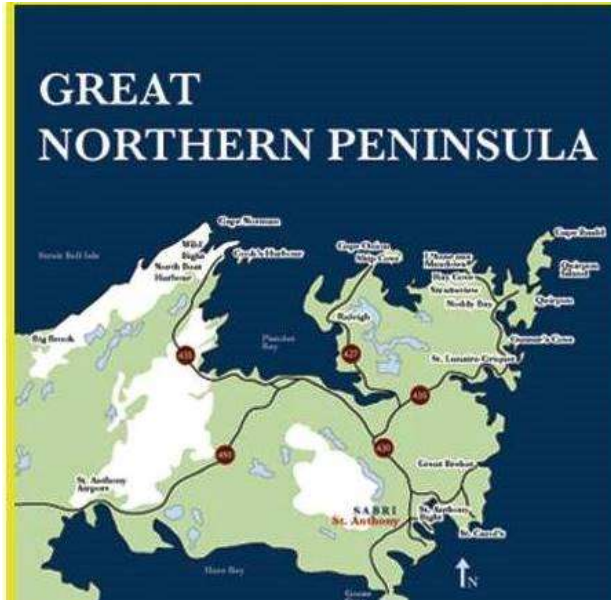
2. Black Rock Cove. Fished by the Pilgrims.
3. Bobby’s Rock. It was a second draw berth, and only in later years would you get any fish there.
4. Pigeon Cove Point. Fished occasionally.
5. Needle’s Point. Fished by the Pilgrims and Colbournes.
6. The Sunker. This was a rock that usually lay just beneath the surface of the water, but it was a prime place to put a trap. Fished by the Pilgrims.
7. Tom’s Island. Second draw.
8. Wash Balls. Various fishers. It was never a draw berth, but there were lots of fish there sometimes.
9. Fish Cove Island. Used by Great Breat fishermen when fish were scarce in their community.
10. Hussey’s Rock. Fished by the Pilgrims and the Richards. It was a beautiful place for fish.

From Trap Fishing to hook & line

Once the trap fishery ended, everyone went with the jigger. And to fish with the jigger, fishermen went to the Offer Grounds, which were about a mile and a half directly east. The names of the various jigging grounds were The Purse, Foxy, Lower and Offer Cutthroat, Poker, and Gun Rock.

Norman Cull Little Brehat

Little Brehat: a resettled community



The resettled community of Little Brehat lies just north of Great Brehat

After Little Brehat resettled in the early 1960s, local fishermen still had entitlement to fish, but once they chose to give up their fishing rights, then fishermen from Great Brehat were allowed to take the berths. However, these Little Brehat berths were not included in the Draw System at Great Brehat.

Fish Cove Island and Fish Cove Shoal were temporary berths used when fish weren't so good in Great Brehat.

However, if a dispute broke out between a fisher from Little Brehat and a fisher from Big Brehat over a berth in Little Brehat, then the Big Brehat fisherman had to give up the berth.

Trap Berths at Little Brehat

1. Tumber Island (called 'The Tumps' locally). Fished by Dickie Richards. When he died, his son Max took over. Prime.
2. Black Rock. Fished by Bramuel (Bramwell?) (Bram) Pilgrim family. Prime.
3. Bobby's Rock. 2nd draw. Fished by various fishers.
4. Upper Tom's Island. 2nd draw.
5. Lower Tom's Island. 2nd draw.
 - Fish Cove Islands. Berths that were made when fish didn't show up at Great Brehat.
 - Fish Cove Shoal. Temporary berths used only if there were no more fish elsewhere.

Trap Berths

1. Tumber Island upper side—towards St. Anthony (also called ‘The Tumps’). Fished by the Richards family. Dickie Richards called it ‘The Garden’. It was a fine place for fish, but a rough and tidey spot.
2. Black Rock Cove. Fished by the Pilgrims.
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4. Pigeon Cove Point. Fished occasionally.
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Figure 1 Little Brehat nautical chart

ⁱ Collar: An anchor, chain and rope attached by means of a loop or bight to a buoy and to bow of boat and used to moor the craft in a harbour; frequently with defining word BOAT, mooring.

ⁱⁱ Store: A building forming part of a merchant's, planter's or fisherman's waterfront premises or 'room' where supplies and gear are stored for use or trade; especially a place where dried and salted codfish are held for shipment; FISH STORE.

ⁱⁱⁱ Flake: A platform built on poles and spread with boughs for drying cod-fish on the foreshore; FISH-FLAKE.

^{iv} Quintal: A measure of dried and salted cod-fish ready for the market; 112 lbs.

^v Trap: A type of fixed fishing-gear used in inshore waters, box-shaped with a length of net stretching from shore to entrance through which cod enter and are trapped.

^{vi} Hogshead: a large cask.

^{vii} Slub: Deposit of brownish-green mucus or slime on fish-nets and gear from minute marine animals.

^{viii} Crump: Stooped, hunched position.

^{ix} Draft: Amount of dried and salted cod-fish carried on a 'barrow' by two men; two quintals or 224 lbs; various other weights of dry fish.

^x Tidy: Of a stretch of water, especially fishing grounds, subject to the turbulence of ocean currents and the ebb and flow of the tide.