

North Boat Harbour



Enos Woodward North Boat Harbour



Decaying wharves at North Boat Harbour. Photo Kathleen Tucker

North Boat Harbour...once a thriving community

Enos and Bessie Woodward live at the far end of North Boat Harbour. It's a quiet community now. The younger folks have all gone west to find work.

North Boat Harbour has a bleak but beautiful landscape. There are no trees; just rocks and cliffs, tempestuous seas and scouring winds.



L-R: Enos's father Nathaniel (Nat) Woodward and his brother Lambert (Lam) Woodward. Photo contributed by Enos Woodward.

Enos sits at his kitchen table and remembers when Boat Harbour was once a bustling community with everyone participating in the fishery. His father Nat and his Uncle Lam were fishermen with a crew of six or seven men; they were the main fishermen in the

community. In those days, everyone in the family fished and, when necessary, they hired local sharemen to supplement their crews. They were equipped with two motorboats, sometimes a third. Back then, everyone built their own boats.

Merchants

For the longest time the nearest merchant was Alf Elliott in Cook's Harbour, but eventually Enos and his brother Gerald opened a shop in Boat Harbour. Enos remembers schooners came from St. John's to pick up the dried fish in the fall: the *Norma and Gladys* and the *Morrisey Johnson*.



Figure 1 Back Row, Nat & Lam Woodward. Front row, L-R, Vicky, Bertha and Marjorie

A good summer's catch

Some seasons were better than others. According to Enos, 500-600 quintals of fish made a good summer's catch. There was a lot of work drying the fish, too. And there were bad summers where they caught only 50 to 60 quintals of fish; so bad that the men would have to go away to work. Enos himself went to Goose Bay.



The spectacular geology of the land, and far-reaching seas of Boat Harbour, makes it an awe-inspiring place to visit. Photo Kathleen Tucker

“North Boat Harbour had good beaches for drying fish, for drying nets, for anything that needed drying,” remembers Enos. “But the disadvantage to spreading fish on the beach was the gulls!”

Storms and ice were hardships to be endured

Fishermen generally put out their ⁱⁱtraps around June 20th, recalls Enos, although the deciding factor was always the ice. There were no ⁱⁱⁱoffer tier ^{iv}berths in Boat Harbour like there were in Cook’s Harbour because the water was too deep and there was too much tide. There were years when the ice came in and they couldn’t put out their traps, and if they put out their traps, “The ice would take your trap and go on.” recalls Enos.

Fishermen had three sources of weather information back then. North Boat Harbour is wide open to the northeast, so storms blew in pretty fierce. Enos recalls, “Sometimes we’d hear about an impending storm on the radio, other times we could sense it. Storms could really tear up your traps. Sometimes we’d hear local talk about weather and we’d take up the traps.”

No trees in Boat Harbour

Because North Boat Harbour was not a hospitable environment for trees, Enos remarks that when men needed ^vwharf sticks they had to travel in over the land towards the airport to cut them, a distance of 10-15 kilometers. And, because of the onslaught of wind and seas, it was necessary to rebuild their wharves on the outside, every year.



Old fishing stores and shed can be seen around North Boat Harbour. Photo Kathleen Tucker

“Almost every year the wharves would wash away, and what the waves didn’t damage the vi
ballicatters did. When there was a northeast wind the seas were heavy,” remarks Enos.

Main fishing crews

- Joe Woodward
- Theophilus Woodward (nicknamed ‘Off’)
- Noah Woodward
- Abraham Woodward (nicknamed Abe)



A tradition of stretching seal pelts is still carried on today

Boat Harbour Trap Berths

There was no quota in those days; fishermen put their traps out in June and fished as long as they could, usually until November. And, if the fish were running, then traps were put wherever fishermen hoped to make a catch.



Modern, colorful sheds at Boat Harbour.

Trap Berths at North Boat Harbour

1. Big Cove: fished by Nat & Lam Woodward—this was their berth before the Draw System. The main berth in this cove was on the eastern side. Prime.
2. Middle Big Cove: Theophilus (Off) Woodward had this one before the Draw System. 2nd draw.
3. Capelin Cove Big Cove: Jack Coates had this berth prior to the Draw. Prime.
4. The Mark: a good berth to work, and no tides to deal with. Prior to the Draw, this was Theophilus' second berth. Prime.
5. Middle of the Harbour: Joe Woodward fished this berth prior to the Draw. Prime.
6. The Gulch: Joe Woodward's berth. 2nd draw.
7. Capelin Cove: this was a rough berth and not always used. If you happened to have a sea, you'd have to take up your nets. You used it at your own risk. It was not in the draw.

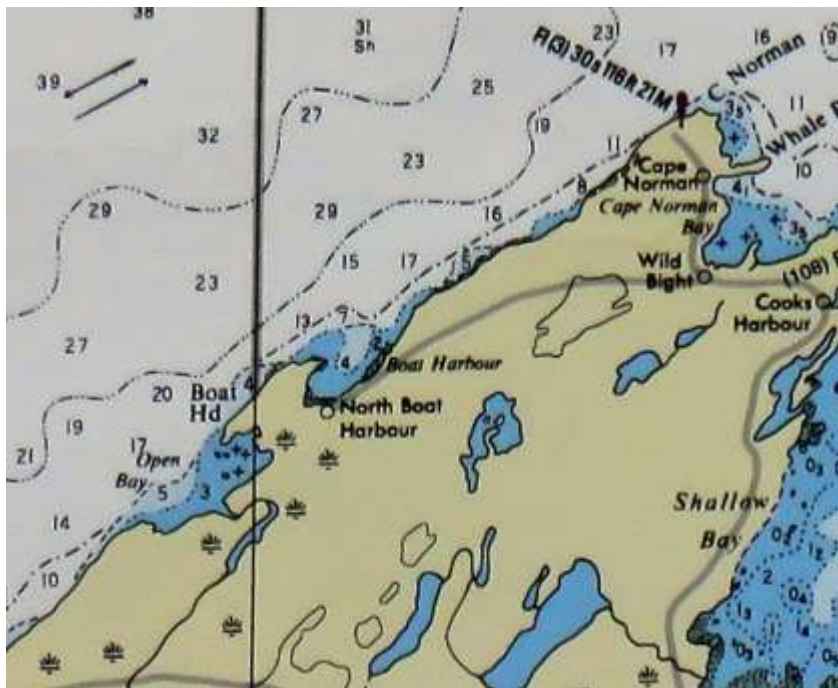


Figure 2 North Boat Harbour nautical chart

ⁱ Quintal: A measure of dried and salted cod-fish ready for the market; 112 lbs.

ⁱⁱ Trap (cod 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ Offer tier berths: Offshore, away from the land; the further seaward of two (or more) objects or features; OUTER.

^{iv} Berth: a particular station on fishing grounds, assigned by custom or lot to a vessel, boat, crew or family; frequently with specifying word COD-TRAP.

^v Wharf sticks: A timber-tree; the trunk of a tree used for various building purposes.

^{vi} Ballicatters: Ice formed by the action in winter of spray and waves along the shore-line, making a fringe or band on the landward side.