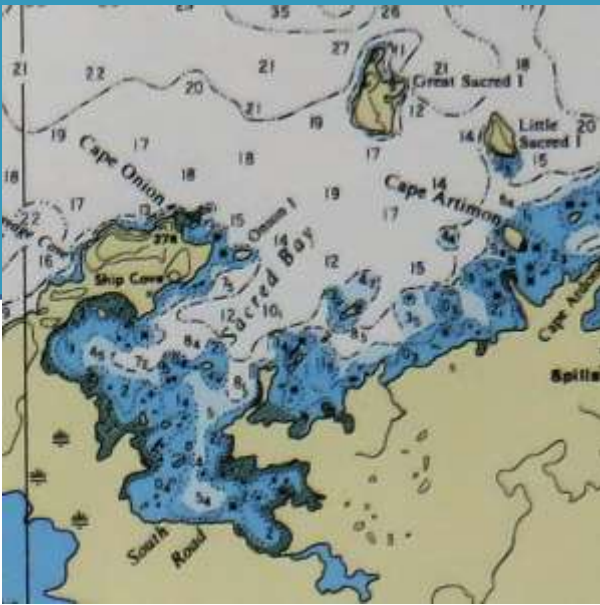


Ship Cove



Ship Cove Delilah & Selby Tucker

--Photos courtesy of the Ship Cove Recreation Center--



Fishing stages and wharves in Ship Cove Harbour

Trap fishing in Ship Cove

In Ship Cove, fishermen were hauling ⁱtraps as early as the first part of the 20th century. A typical crew had five or six men.

Before fishing with cod traps, Kenneth and Selby Tucker of Ship Cove fished with hook and line, trawls, jiggers or gill nets. In 1967 Selby was just past 40 years of age with a young family when he and his father went to Raleigh and bought their first cod trap.

As Selby's boys grew older, they were able to help in the boat. When they were small, the boys hauled on one line together. Two boats were usually used, the motorboat and the ⁱⁱrodney. The purpose of the rodney (which was tied onto the head of the trap) was to keep the trap from sinking. Sometimes there was a person in the rodney to help keep the trap up, but not always. In the motorboat, the fishermen hauled on the ⁱⁱⁱlinnet till the fish were all ^{iv}dried up, or level with the surface of the water. Then two or three men dipped the fish out of the trap and dumped them into the boat.



Andrews' wharves and stages



A trap skiff at the wharf



Codfish in the store

Splitting Fish

Before the fish could be split, the boat was tied up at the wharf and the fish were pronged onto the stage. The prong had two tines on it, and care was taken to use the prongs to prong two fish at a time in the head, rather than pronging indiscriminately. If there was a young boy around, he'd take the fish out of the box and put them on the table. At the splitting table there were cutthroaters, headers, and splitters. Delilah Tucker (Selby's wife) was a cutthroater, and she says

a good cutthroat could keep two splitters going. The splitter's job was to take out the soundbone, and the splitter wore a glove on one hand. After the soundbone was removed, the fish was then washed in a vat (pronounced 'vate'), which was a wooden bathtub full of sea water. Once washed, the fish was then taken in a wheelbarrow to the shed, where it was salted. Elizabeth Tucker (Selby's mother) didn't wear gloves to salt the fish; she used a saucer to sprinkle the salt over the fish; Delilah used her bare hands. A prime fish didn't have a peck on it. There were two types of salted fish: ^vshore fish and ^{vi}Labrador, and, according to Delilah, you could never put too much salt on Labrador fish.



Returning with a load of fish

Fishing season and ice factors

How good the season was depended on many factors: climate, weather, ice, and fish.

One year the ice came in and drove all the fish to the bottom of the bay. In order to get at the fish, and instead of using a boat and a trap net, Selby and Kenneth used trawls and wore thigh rubbers.

The Draw System

Before the Draw System, it was first come, first served when choosing a trap berth. There is a story of a Ship Cove resident who was a church-goer. One Sunday night he wasn't at church because he had gone out and staked his claim to a berth. Someone at church noted his absence and said it would have been better for him to be in church rather than staking his claim on a Sunday night.

Before the Draw, fishermen staked their claim to a berth, but once the draw system was in, fishermen drew their berths and that was that. To draw berths, there would be a meeting at the school, and the men would be wondering what berth they were going to get.

Ship Cove Skippers, Trap fishing

Will John Tucker

Herb Tucker

Bill Tucker

Kenneth Tucker

Selby Tucker

Fred Noseworthy

Keywood Roberts

James Decker

Reg Decker

Ross Decker

Ray Decker

Abel Decker

Charles Decker

Bessey family in Cape Onion

Adams family in Cape Onion

Prime Berths

The Deckers usually wanted Lance O' Wash (a possible mispronunciation of the French, *L'anse aux Sauvage*); The Adams' usually wanted Harbour Island.

It was said that if the Besseys didn't get The Onion, they didn't want anything.

Garland Andrews Ship Cove

--Photos contributed by Ship Cove Recreation Center



Andrews' wharves and stages (Decker's in forefront)

From hook and line to ^{vii}trap fishing

Garland (Garl) Andrews was born in Ship Cove in 1934. His father Jack Andrews fished with hook and line and, in his father's day, fishermen knitted their own nets, often in the kitchen at night. He recalls that fishermen made their own ^{viii}trawl ropes, too. The lines attached to the trawl were called ^{ix}sid lines, and the hook was attached to the sid lines. These lines were about a fathom apart, or six feet, and about half a fathom long. Garl recalls, "And there was a tub in the boat and the trawl line was coiled inside the tub. This was supposed to keep the trawl line from snarling up, but more than once they were snarled up."

Garl remembers a time when he was out fishing. A hook, three inches long and thicker than a darning needle, went through his thumb, so he took a knife, cut off the line and steered the boat for home. He walked to the home of Minnie Roberts, a local lady who helped when she could, but even Minnie couldn't get the hook out because of the barb, so Garl went to the hospital and had it removed by a doctor.

The fishery was already on the decline then. Garl says, "I believe I was only at trap-fishing three years. My crew were myself, my brothers Gus, Wes and Den." The fishery dwindled so much

that all the young men began to leave, till finally there was no fish, and no crews to fish. The young men headed for Goose Bay, Labrador City, or Alberta. “I bought my last trap at Ford Elms’ store, but fishing went right down to nothing and I never even used it,” remarks Garl.

(Asked if he had taken any pictures of men fishing, or of the fishery, Garl sputters, “Nobody took pictures back then! We didn’t even know what a camera looked like for gracious’ sake! If you mentioned a camera, people didn’t even know what you were talking about!”)



A couple of young fellows on the Andrews’ flakes

Trap fishing skippers in Ship Cove

- Francis & Hayward Tucker
- Fred Noseworthy (Reginald Bessey helped him with his trap)
- Keywood Roberts
- Fred & William (Bill) Roberts
- Ray Decker
- Ross Decker
- Charles Bessey
- Harry Adams

Long ago, fishermen knitted their own trap nets

“Back in Charles Bessey’s day, they knit all their own nets with twine. But in my day we ordered the net from the store and put it together ourselves. We used the same twine; different size meshes. The men used to knit the twine on the chair at nighttime.”

A common sight in local homes through the winter—when it was time for the nets to be mended—would be reams of netting hanging from the ceiling. When the twine was purchased it was white; fishermen ^xbarked it in the spring.



A twine hook (such as this one) was suspended from the ceiling—it was usually carved from wood. This twine hook made the mending of nets an easier job for fishermen. Photo by Kathleen Tucker

Garl remembers the last cod trap he bought was nylon, and it was black. It came in bundles and had to be put together. One year Garl went as far as Hickman’s Harbour to buy a cod trap. “When I bought it, everything came with it: ^xgrapelins, moorings, floaters...” He also made a longshore trap. “That took a long time and they were costly to make.”

The Draw System

Before the draw, people picked their own berths. There were prime berths and second berths. The Onion was an example of a prime berth. “If you got he you’d be on Cloud Nine,” remarked Garl.

At the draw, all the names of the skippers were put into a bag. The man whose name came out of the bag first, he was the first to draw a name out of the berth bag. Garl remembers those meetings well. “All the fishermen was doing then was snarling! I’m going to tell you the truth; I won’t tell you no lies about it: every feller was against the other feller. So...if someone drew The Onion, well, they’d say, ‘what’s the point in me drawing now?’ Everybody was after that berth; if they didn’t get he, they didn’t care to get ‘ere one.”

The first year he entered the Draw System, Garl drew The Onion, the next year Harbour Island, and the third year, Lance O’ Wash (*from the French, L’anse aux Sauvage*). “Now,” says Garl, “the Gold Pot was a good berth in the old days, but I never got much from it that year, and Lance O’ Wash was too rough. If there was a westerly wind you couldn’t touch it. Harbour Island and the Onion were good because they were only five minutes away, and they were both smooth.”

Augustus (Gus) Andrews Ship Cove

--Photos by Kathleen Tucker--



Looking across to Cape Onion from L'anse aux Meadows

From trawl to trap

Gus Andrews was born in Ship Cove in 1944. He fished with his father, Jack Andrews, a hook-and-line fisherman. Jack Andrews had a handful of boys; Garland, Augustus, Wesley, Lloyd, Alonzo and Dennis; more than enough to make up a crew, but a hook and line fisherman didn't need a large crew, so Gus went ^{xiii}shareman with Bill Tucker, a trap fisherman who lived in Tucker's Cove. He fished with Bill two summers and then went shareman with Ross and Weldon Decker for a few years. Like many of his generation, he could read the writing on the wall; the fishery wasn't what it had been in the past. He found work on the American Base in St. Anthony and then went off to Goose Bay for a couple of years. "In the late '80s a lot of young men packed their bags and left, realizing the fishery was closing down," recalls Gus.

Trap berths and the Draw System

Those ^{xiii}trap fishermen that Gus fished with had a crew and managed two cod traps. When the Draw System was in, the skippers would have drawn for a prime berth and a secondary berth.

As well as two cod traps, the crew managed two capelin traps. Capelin, which, in the old days had been used for bait, dog feed, or to fertilize the gardens, was no longer caught using a cast net from the shore; now it had become a commercial enterprise and was sold internationally. With the capelin traps, “you could haul enough capelin for a lifetime, old man,” remembers Gus.



A jigger reel

The year the ice came in, “the fish was millions”

Gus reflects, “The year the ice came in...that was sometime in the late 1950s. Perhaps I was a ^{xiv}bellamer boy, 13 or 14 year old.

(There were younger boys, called ^{xv}gaffers, but a gaffer was not old enough to do a man’s work. There was a gaff in the boat and you used the gaff to hook onto buoys and things like that, and a boy that age was well able to do that.)

“We had a trap the year the ice was around. Boy! The ice came in and then it went out and when it come back it drove the fish ahead of it. And it went right up in the bottom of the bay; right on up to The Dock, and there were the fish and capelin rolling, rolling ashore. At night-time she might move out a little, and in the morning she’d move back in. The ice floated around in the bottom of the bay and I think it stayed around that year until July. That was a perfect summer, boy. Dad had a trawl, and I’d say you could haul with your thigh rubbers on. You could see every fish on the hook. I can remember all about it, sure.

And if we put our trap anywhere up there, you couldn’t leave it out at night. We’d set it, have a day’s fishing, and take it up and bring it in overnight, because of the ice. And the fish was millions. And after she settled out, there was millions on the outside as well.

“There was a piece of ice alongside of our stage and it grounded. It was a great big high piece, just like a spar. We used to have to scrabble in, get the fish out of the boat, and put it on the ^{xvi}collar, in case the ice would ^{xvii}founder. The ^{xviii}punt would be on the ^{xix}haul-off. And I remember they used to fire rifle bullets at it, and no man knows how many rifle bullets were

fired at it. But firing bullets never done the trick, I tell you. The ice stayed there a long time. I can remember we got aboard the punt one day to go up on the collar, and just as we got through, there she goes! Foundered! We were just barely clear of it. And that was the year of the ice.”

Drawing berths

We had two berths...there were so many prime berths and then there was the ones that wasn't so famous; they were put in a second draw. If you had a second trap you needed a second draw.

The berth called Back of the Bar was in the knotty waters; right in the Gut between the Onion and Ben's Rock. The waters were ^{xx}knotty; meaning they wouldn't be good to you; they were lippy, rough.

Ross Decker Ship Cove

--Photos contributed by Ship Cove Recreation Center--



Reginald Decker, a fisherman and merchant at Ship Cove

Ross loved fishing and cried to go out in the boat

Ross Decker can remember being a small boy and crying to go out fishing. He loved the life from an early age. When he finished grade nine his father put him to work in the twine loft, knitting twine. Ross loved fishing and was eager to be at it. He found it difficult to wake up in the mornings, though. "I fished with my brother, Guy, and in the morning, to wake me up; he'd take me out of the bed and set me on my feet on the floor." Ross confesses there were times he took naps in the twine loft, too. Guy didn't fish with his father's crew; he was already on his own, separate from his father, and he and Ross fished with hook and line.



Jim and Effie Decker

Ross's father was Jim Decker, who was not only a fisherman, but a merchant as well. James (Jim) Decker and his brother Reginald (Reg) Decker operated Decker's Store in Ship Cove. They had a fishing enterprise as well; they were trap fishermen and had two boats and three traps; that was in the 1930s and 1940s. When Jim and Reg Decker retired, their sons carried on the fishing enterprise.

Ross fished with a trap from the 1960s until the Moratorium in 1992.



Deckers wharves and stages (forefront)

The Draw System

Although Ross can't exactly remember when the Draw System was implemented in Ship Cove, he remembers it was firmly established by the time he was married in 1960. On the night of the draw, the fishermen would assemble in a school or a hall. Skippers had their names written on pieces of paper and the names of the available berths written on pieces of paper. Someone drew the skipper's name out of a bag and then the skipper whose name was drawn drew his berth out of another bag.

There was a first draw (for the best berths) and a second draw for the second berths. The Gold Pot and The Onion were the most coveted berths.



Fish drying on flakes at the Decker Premises in Ship Cove

Before the Draw System

Ross remembers the Adams family always had The Onion berth prior to the Draw System, and that was because of proximity; the Adams lived at Cape Onion and the Onion berth was right in front of their house. The Gold Pot, traditionally the best berth of all, was fished by the Deckers prior to the Draw System.

If there was a mackerel sky...how fishermen predicted the weather

Ross recalls, “Usually, if we knew a storm was brewing and it was going to do damage to our nets, we’d take them up, but it was a day’s job, with a crew, to take up a trap. When it came to a storm, most fishermen were tuned into the weather. For instance, if there was a mackerel sky, we’d know weather was coming. Or if the sea was heaving, we’d know the wind was going to go southern. And the weather forecasts, made by fishermen; were spot on,” smiles Ross.

As far as Ross was concerned, fishermen were born weathermen. Every household had a weather glass (barometer) on their wall. If the weather glass was falling, it meant a low pressure system was on the way. Fishermen used various means to gauge the weather, and their predictions were always accurate.



Jim Decker’s weather glass...circa 1950s

The price of fish: a dollar a quintal...

Ross’s wife, Iris, remembers Uncle Abe Decker (James and Reginald’s brother) saying that he and his crew had 999 quintals of fish one season, but got no more than a dollar a quintal.

One cent for a pound of fish...

Ross remembers, “One year we got one cent a pound for fish, or \$1.12 per quintal. Mr. Chafe was the buyer, and that year we called him One Cent Chafe.”

The Deckers were agents for two different fish buyers in St. John’s: Ayre & Sons and Sheers.

Not all agents shipped their catch to St. John’s. Some, like the merchant in Cook’s Harbour, bought fish from fishermen, stockpiled it, and when the schooners came in the fall, sold it to the schooner captains. If the schooners came in they were docked at the government wharf, or anchored in the harbor, and they could operate boats on either side. The weights and the scales were all on the deck. Sometimes they docked at a fisherman’s stage where dry fish was stored, and they’d cull and measure the fish right there.



Raymond Decker and Arch Regular with a codfish

TRAP BERTHS AT SHIP COVE

contributed by

Gus Andrews, Garland Andrews, Ross Decker, Bob Tucker and Selby Tucker

1. Point of Bay. 2nd draw.
2. Ship Wreck Island East. Prime.
3. Great Sacred Island (inside). 2nd draw.
4. Great Sacred Island (outside). Prime.
5. Harbour Island (outside). 2nd draw.
6. Harbour Island (middle). Prime.
7. Ship Cove Island. 2nd draw.
8. John Brooks' Berth. Prime.
9. John's Point. 2nd draw.
10. The Gold Pot. Prime. Traditionally the best berth of all. Operated by the Deckers prior to the Draw System.
11. Upper Job. Prime.
12. Middle Job. 2nd draw. Open.
13. Lower Job. Prime.
14. Back of the Bar. 2nd draw. Located in the knotty (loppy, rough) waters; right in the Gut between the Onion and Ben's Rock.
15. Tucker's Cove. 2nd draw.
16. Decker's Berth.
17. Waterman's Berth.
18. Qui-ho (Keyhole?)
19. Harbour Island (inside)
20. Ship Wreck Island (west)
21. Ship Wreck Island
22. The Onion. Prime. One of the most coveted berths. Fished by the Adams family prior to the Draw System.

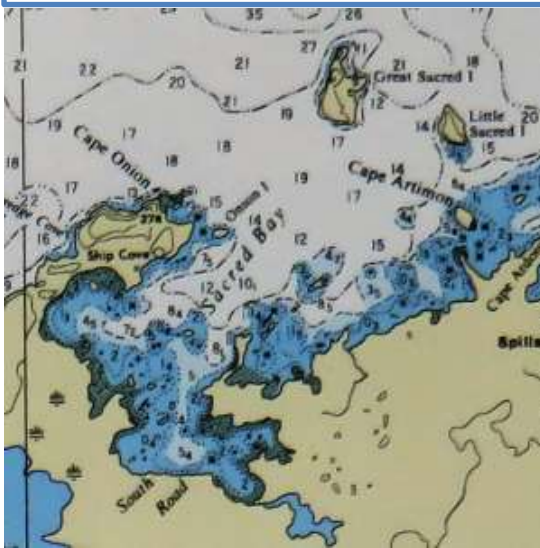


Figure 1 Ship Cove nautical chart

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- ⁱ 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 migrating cod enter and are trapped.
- ⁱⁱ Rodney: A small round-bottomed boat with square stern, used chiefly as a tender; a small punt.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Linnet: Twine for knitting fish-nets; the sections of netting forming the several parts of such nets; the complete net, seine, trap or all of these collectively; TWINE.
- ^{iv} Dried: draw up
- ^v Shore fish: cod-fish prepared for market with light application of salt and extended drying period.
- ^{vi} Labrador: A variety of heavily salted, semi-dried cod produced in the Labrador fishery; often attributed with designations of 'cure' or grade.
- ^{vii} 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 migrating cod (and salmon) enter and are trapped.
- ^{viii} Trawl: a buoyed line, of great length, to which short lines with baited hooks are attached at intervals.
- ^{ix} Sid line: A grade of line used for attaching hooks to a trawl-line, and for various other purposes.
- ^x Bark (a trap): To steep in an infusion of bark; to tan, as a preservative.
- ^{xi} Grapnel: Light anchor to moor small boats and fixed or stationary fishing gear.
- ^{xii} Shareman: Member of a fishing crew who receives a stipulated proportion of the profits of a voyage rather than wages.
- ^{xiii} 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 migrating cod (and salmon) enter and are trapped.
- ^{xiv} Bellamer Boy: a youth approaching manhood.
- ^{xv} Gaffer: a boy, young fellow, especially one capable of assisting older men at work.
- ^{xvi} Collar: an anchor, chain and rope attached by means of a loop or bight to a buoy and to the bow of a boat and used to moor the craft in a harbour.
- ^{xvii} Founder: to fall down, give way.¹ To crumble, capsize, let fall, to cause to collapse.
- ^{xviii} Punt: An undecked boat up to 25 ft (7.6 m) in length, round-bottomed and keeled, driven by oars, sail or engine and used variously in the inshore or coastal fishery; BOAT, RODNEY, SKIFF.
- ^{xix} Haul-off: a rope from the head of a wharf out into the water, attached to an anchor or a rock. It is outfitted with a pulley (operates like a clothesline). The boat is attached to the haul-off and can be reeled in when needed.
- ^{xx} Knotty: of the weather, rough, stormy.