

L'Anse aux Meadows

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.

L'Anse aux Meadows Point

Recollections of early childhood

BILL CARPENTER

I used to go to L'Anse aux Meadows bake-apple picking with my mother in the middle-to-late 1950s. My sister taught school there and she married Alf Anderson. When I was a kid, we used to go up to the Viking site – we didn't know what it was then, it was just mounds – and when I see the kids now with their skateboards, I remember how we used to be up there with bicycles. We'd ride up and down over the mounds just to pass the time. Back then the Viking site was called the Indian Burial Grounds. But what a beautiful place – that whole Point. The grass would grow up, and in the summer it blew in waves like the waves on the sea. We'd ride our bikes through it, or up and down the mounds; it was one big playground. The wind would be so warm blowing out of the bay. What a beautiful, beautiful place!

Later Years

Later, when I was nineteen years old, I was a high school teacher. Everybody was really respectful of



Figure 2 Hedley Bartlett's House in L'Anse aux Meadows.
Photo by Horace McNeill

teachers; I was just a young kid who had attended university for two years; never done anything other than being a student. And I'd go out into a community and here's everybody looking right up to you. That's the way it was back then: There was God – then the priest, the pastor, or the minister – and then there were the teachers.

As a young teacher, I might go visiting in L'Anse aux Meadows, and next thing I'd know, here'd come somebody with a salt rebate, or an unemployment form, or something for you to do. There was always

somebody asking you to do this or do that.

Flour Sack Bloomers and Rubber Clothes

WINSTON COLBOURNE

I've seen women with flour sack drawers and the big old long dress. You remember the hundred pound bags of flour? I can remember Mom saying, "Flour sack! Everybody down on the beach with sand, and go to it." We'd rub off Old Robin Hood and that would be our underwear. I can remember my grandmother used to make them with elastic in the waist and legs. They were called bloomers.

Not only that, there was no such thing as oil clothes, or rubber clothes for fishing. Mother used to make them with old Cream of the West flour bags or Robin Hood bags. And she'd make them nice, eh? Oh, they were right beautiful! Then she'd spoil them with linseed oil. Linseed

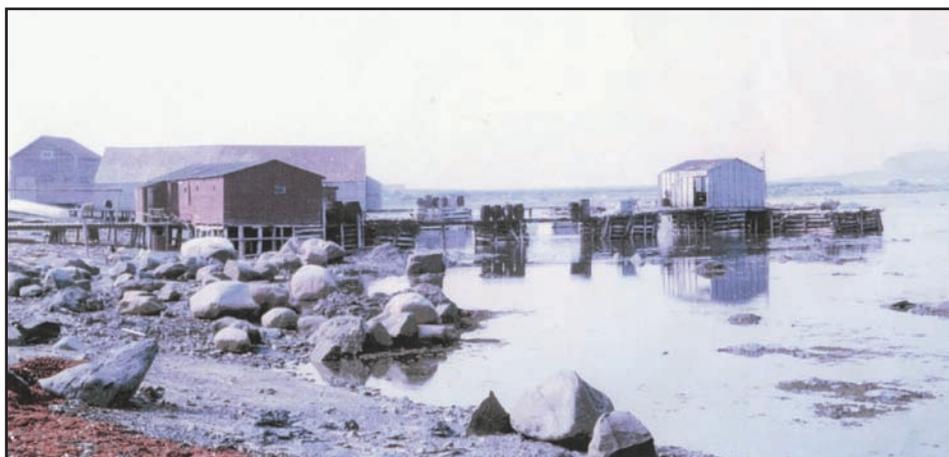


Figure 1 L'Anse aux Meadows Point. Photo by Horace McNeill

oil, I mean, is the smelliest thing in my life that ever I smelled. And the smell would make me seasick! I'd get out in boat, and oh, my, throw up my guts. But I loved me clothes, eh? She'd make nice pants and then she'd soak them four or five times in linseed oil, then she'd boil them in linseed oil, and then she'd soak them again, and they were waterproof. I thought the world of them, but you'd always get that stink on them!

MAUDE & WINSTON COLBOURNE

Mrs. Maude Colbourne was born Maude Bartlett in 1926, married Harvey Colbourne and settled into life at L'Anse aux Meadows. Together, Maude and Harvey raised eleven children but, when he was only forty – seven years old, he died out in the woods, leaving her to raise eleven children on her own. Mrs. Colbourne saw her fair share of sorrow and hard times, but she had a resilient spirit and was never afraid of hard work. She helped with fishing, salting, cooking, cleaning, cutting wood and, as often as she could, trouting and picking berries. In her own words, she says, "I did it all." As well as looking after her own large family, primarily on her own, Mrs. Colbourne baked bread for Helge Ingstad and his crew for seven years.

Early days

I was born 1926, and I was 19 when I got married. I was born here, married here, lived here, and I'm going to die here.

You name it and I done it. I done everything. I fished in the boats, and one summer I salted 318 quintals; that's 112 pound per quintal, and dried it, too, row after row after row.



Figure 1 Winston Colbourne with his mother, Maude

And when it rained, I had to run out and take it all back up, and I might have a line of clothes out perhaps, and I'd be scrambling to get it all in.

In the morning, there'd be a big pot of boiled beans on the stove. Cut up pork and put it in the pot, and anything else I had. By the time we got in from fishing, the beans would be ready, or sometimes there was fish for breakfast.

Nothing was electric back then. You had your bucksaw for cutting wood. I'd take the kettle out to the woods, have a boil-up, and I used to go trouting. We didn't used to have 'bought' fishing poles; poles was homemade, —they were bamboo. We'd put a line on the end and a hook and go trouting. I still have my bamboo pole now.

And I picked berries. I'd get someone to take care of the little ones because I wouldn't take them around the bay. I loved picking berries; I used to go with Eliza, Winston's wife, and we'd have some old feed. Sometimes it was cold enough to freeze you and the rain was pouring down; but we'd pick some berries,

then go down to the beach for a boil-up, then back to picking berries again.

We had a little store right on the end of the stage. We stored flour, salt, beef and pork, and we had a big old wooden barrel, a 45-gallon drum full of partridgeberries. They'd freeze in the winter. You'd go scrape the juice and berries and bring it in. You had no fridges, so you had to store food outdoors in winter. There was also had an old root cellar, and we raised cows and sheep. I'd get milk and cream from the cows.

I went in the woods with the dogs to haul wood. You name it, I done it. If anyone said trouting, or berrying, or camping, I'd be gone. I loved the outdoors. The camp was seven miles away, so we'd get on the dog team or, later, ski-doo, and go to the cabin.

A widow with eleven children

My husband, Harvey, was only forty-seven year-old when he died; that was thirty-five years ago. I had my ups and downs after that. I had eleven children to raise, so there were

lots of ups and downs. The day he died; I remember I looked out the window and I saw my son Clifford, and he was white from shock. He had his dad on the sleigh, covered over. Harvey had been with the boys at the camp in the woods. He had started with the logs; that's where he died, in the woods, in my son Clayton's arms. Clayton told me his father had come down across the pond, he had a big ski-doo, and he shoved too hard in the slush; but perhaps it doesn't matter; he might have died even if he had done nothing. Anyway, he had a heart attack. Just before he died, he put on a kettle to boil and when it boiled he had a sup of tea and fell back and died. Oh, my dear, if we all died like that it would be really, really good.

Inside work

Maude: I knit barrels of sweaters and socks. I did that for everybody in Hay Cove and L'Anse aux Meadows. I gave them to everybody. We had sheep wool; I used to card and spin. You name it, I done it. There was always something to do; always work to be done. There was no such thing at night time as laying around. Oh, no.

Winston: In the weather we had cod traps; you didn't go and buy cod traps; you got your own twine and made your own, night after night, and your fingers would be all blistery. You had to make your own needles, too. The kitchen would be full of nets. You might get three or four men making the nets, and the children had to go and hide away where we wouldn't see them.

Seen but not heard

When I was a boy, and visitors

came, parents would say, "Now, git! And stay in your room, or you won't get no lunch." The children had to! Strangers come to the house; the children weren't allowed to speak. Back then, you'd get more people visiting; grandfather would come over, and Dad was going to have a chat with him, but you wasn't allowed to speak up. And if you had nothing to do, it was wash the dishes, wipe the dishes or, probably someone might say, we need more water in the barrel, so you'd take your buckets and your hoop and get off to the brook, no questions asked. There had to be water. And if there were cows, well, they had to be milked. We had two milk cows, —and one to kill.

Maude: I had fifty ducks one summer, and chickens.

Winston: And Mother had her apron; they used to all wear aprons. She'd go out to collect eggs, she'd be putting them in her apron; I'd be looking around in the grass because the hens used to lay everywhere. To preserve the eggs, we'd put them in a barrel and layer them either with salt or sawdust.

Maude: I used eggs in baking, or custard.

Winston: We were always prepared, and we never went hungry. If weather was coming on, we knew we needed water. We knew where the water hole was to, so we'd bail the water till the brook was iced over, then we'd go to the bogs with the dogs, or on the autoboggan to get water, or we melted snow or ice.

Winston: It's the only way to live, the proper way for a Newfoundlander to live; working hard. My father was a workaholic. If he was out

in the woods, and got stuck, or if something wouldn't work, he'd say, "You're going to go, or bust." I seen him down on the beach with a 27' motorboat, with his back up to it, pushing it himself.

Maude: I made bread for the Norwegians for seven years: Helge Ingstad and his crew. One time, when a big wind came, it lifted up their tent and tore it; so they gathered it up, put it in a wheelbarrow, and brought it to me. I repaired it on my treadle machine. I did everything back then.

Winston: The Norwegians had every kind of cheese in the world, in big wheels. They used to bring it down and put it in our cellar. Cheese, and bacon, that's where they kept it. Where else would they have kept it? There was no refrigeration; there was no road, they had no boat, no car. That was back in the early 1960s before there were roads.

Maude: But they loved the little children.

Viking ancestors

MAX ANDERSON

Max and Gladys Anderson lived over sixty years in L'Anse aux Meadows. They raised a family of ten children and fished and lived off the land like many others of their generation. Although they were aware of the 'Indian Camp', it was never anything more than a playground for Max and

his brothers, as well as for his own children. Ingstad's visit to their community forever changed the way people viewed the strange mounds, but never really changed the men and women of L'Anse aux Meadows who were still, at heart, people who took their livelihood from the water and fashioned their homes, their tools and their lives with their own hands.

Norwegian roots

Max Anderson was born in 1927 and lives in L'Anse aux Meadows with his wife of sixty years, Gladys Tucker. Max's father was Charles Anderson, who came from Makkovick, Labrador. Charles was the son of Alfred James Anderson, who was the son of Torsten Anderson of Norway. As a young man, Charles came from Makkovik with Dr. Grenfell, suffering from tuberculosis of the ankle, and was hospitalized in St. Anthony. When he recovered, Charles stayed on in the area and became a herder of reindeer. He married a local girl, Delina Bartlett, and eventually gave up herding reindeer to go fishing, and continued fishing all his life. Charles and Delina had five sons: Job, Alfred, Max, Gower and Dorman. Two daughters died in infancy.

As a young man, Max fished like everybody else. He started with a trawl and jigger and later used a trap; then gill nets. Sometimes fishermen carried their catch to Quirpon, some more times, in the fall of the year, a schooner would come in and buy the fish. Max remembers he and his brothers fished all their life with their father. In the summertime, Max would fish and, for seventeen years, he also drove a school bus back and forth to St. Anthony.

Max met Gladys Tucker in Ship Cove, where he was a member of the



Figure 1 Photo Album made for their 60th anniversary

Loyal Orange Lodge. To attend Lodge meetings, Max, as well as others from L'Anse aux Meadows, would make the trip across Sacred Bay by boat in summer; other times they would cross the bay by dog team, and sometimes, if there was ice on the bay, they would walk. Gladys lived in Ship Cove, just down over the hill from the Lodge, and Max met her as a consequence of going around from house to house. They were mar-

ried in 1949 and settled in L'Anse aux Meadows where, together, they raised ten children. Max and Gladys celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary March 2009.

Gladys says of her 50th wedding anniversary, "It was the first time I'd seen all my children together in twenty-seven years." Some of their children are in Toronto, some in Goose Bay, one in England, one in Griquet, and one in Rocky Harbour.

They have twenty-three grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Mr. Anderson remembers Ingstad

Mr. Anderson says the people of L'Anse aux Meadows didn't know what was happening when Ingstad showed up at the wharf in 1961, but he says the residents were really too busy with fishing and raising their families to worry about what was going on at the 'Indian Camp.' Local custom held that the as yet unknown Viking Site was an Indian burial ground. To local people like Max, the Indian Camp was nothing more than a playground when he was



This picture was taken on the occasion of Max and Gladys's 50th wedding anniversary, in Goose Bay, Labrador. Back Row, L-R: Edward, Charlie, Mildred, Dorman, Barry, Lorne. Front Row, L-R: Maurice, Diane, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, Viola and Morgan.

growing up; a place where they would pick berries and play on the mounds.

“I was already grown up and married when Mr. Ingstad arrived in L’Anse aux Meadows,” says Mr. Anderson, and adds, “Ingstad arrived in a motorboat from Raleigh. He was a nice man.”

Sunday traditions

Mr. Anderson says they didn’t have a church in L’Anse aux Meadows; they had a school in Hay Cove. It served as an Anglican and a United Church. Church was held once a month, and there was no work on Sunday.

Gladys remembers her grandmother, Susannah Bessey, kept Sunday school. She recalls they weren’t even allowed to pick a berry on Sunday. As a child, she went to Sunday school and every Sunday she’d go to church if there was church, and then the children and young people would go down on the hills for the rest of it.

From Dr. Thomas’ Servant Girl to Toronto Hairdresser

Diane, one of Max and Gladys’ daughters, worked with Dr. Thomas in St. Anthony; she was like a servant girl then. She kept house for awhile, then the Grenfell Association sent her away to do a hairdressing course and she’s been hairdressing ever since, and has her own business in Toronto.

Norwegian forbearers

Max Anderson, if you consider that his ancestors came from Norway to Makkovick to L’Anse aux Meadows, is a long way from home. Yet, if you consider that the Vikings who settled in L’Anse aux Meadows came from Scandinavia, Max is not really

that far from home at all. And, as he sits by the old woodstove, gazing out the kitchen window at the Atlantic while his wife Gladys puts the tea on the table, there is a sense of timelessness in the customs and traditions passed down from generation to gen-

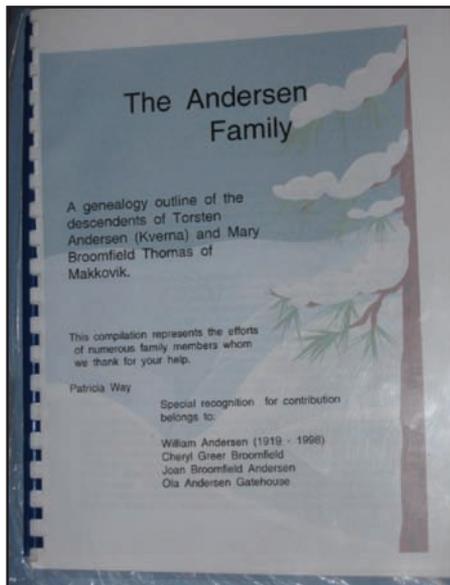


Figure 2
Max Anderson’s link to Norway

eration; like links in a chain connecting the past to the present.

When I became a man

WINSTON COLBOURNE



Figure 1 Inside the stage

A coming of age is not so much a sudden leap into manhood; rather, it’s facing situations as they come, day-by-day: evaluating them, drawing conclusions, and acting on them. It’s one thing to stand up to strangers; it’s quite another to stand up to someone you love and respect. Winston tells of such a coming of age.

Splitting fish

I was down at the stages, splitting fish with my father and mother, and my mother said, “I’m sick.”

I said, “What do you mean, sick? Where are you sick?”

And she said, “In my belly. I’m having a baby.” That was the first time I knew she was pregnant; it was never spoken of when I was growing up. I didn’t know how babies were made; I had a baby made before I even knew what was going on.

I figured it was time for things to change; time for my mother not to be doing a man’s work. She was expecting her eleventh child. My father figured she should be there, splitting fish with us. I was sixteen years old then, and I took her right back to the house and told her not to be at that again. My father was angry, and

said, “Where are we going to get somebody to help us split fish?” I told him there were seven boys and they would have to learn how to do it; but Mother was not doing a man’s work anymore. He didn’t like it, but he could see my mind was made up.

Seen but not heard

When we was kids, we used to get a lot more visitors than we do now; Grandfather would be coming over, or uncles would be visiting. But, as children, we weren’t allowed to butt in. You had to keep back in a corner and mind your own business. You couldn’t go talking when you uncles or your parents were talking. Oh, no! You’d get slapped up the side of the head. And so, I didn’t know my mother was pregnant until she told me that day. And that’s the day I stopped being a boy and became a man. That’s the day I stood up to my father.



Figure 2 Mrs. Maude Colbourne

They was coming from Griquet from a Time at three o’clock in the morning on a komatik, pulled by a dog team, and it was a beautiful night. Mother was sitting on the komatik box. My father, Harve, he always carried his five-cell flashlight, just in case he had to get out and clear up one of his dogs. So, when they tipped to come down into Muddy Cove, Mother said, “Somebody’s coming down Nellie’s Pinch.” And then she said, “Harve, there’s a man ahead of us!”



Figure 1 Winston Colbourne at L’Anse aux Meadows

The Brown Man

If you ever went to my mother, and said, “Mrs. Colbourne, did you ever see the Brown Man?” The first thing she’d say would be, “Yes, me and my husband Harve, we saw him.”

“Yes, maid,” he said. “I sees him.”

The man was coming out through a rocky hill; you could see the man and you could see his shadow on the snow. Mother and Father came on out and would have passed along, but

the dogs just stopped. Nobody said, “Whoa, dogs.” They just stopped and looked at this fellow.

The man went on out, and when he got to a rock – they used to say down in Muddy Cove there’s a Brown Man’s chair; it’s a rock in the formation of a chair – he went out around this rock, and first thing Mother knew, he sat down in the chair.

When Mother and Father came on a little bit, Dad took out the flashlight and shone it on him, and he was brown right from his foot to his head. He was called the Brown Man because his clothes was all brown, you see.

There were no words spoken.

When they got home Father and Mother told Grandfather William (Bill) Bartlett, but he didn’t believe it.

When I got up a man, I said, “Father, I don’t believe that.”

“Well, Winston, boy,” he said, “You don’t think I’d tell a lie, do you?”

I don’t think my father would tell a lie for anything.

“Well, boy,” he said, “that’s the only ghost that ever I’ve seen in my life.”

And that’s all I know about the Brown Man.

The ghost of my grandmother?

My grandmother reared me up, and one day she and I got talking about the Brown Man that Dad seen, and ghosts, and spirits, and stuff like that.

“Winston,” she said, “I got that much love for you that when I die, if there’s any such thing as coming back, don’t you be afraid. Because you know I’m going to die young; I’ve got cancer on the brain. Now, be prepared,” she said, “because I might

come back.”

She was fifty-three year old when she died and I was seven year old.

I used to think about seeing my grandmother. I used to have to come around the bottom of that cove with the cemetery right there, and every time, Nan would be in my mind. I was scared on one hand, and not so scared on the other, and that went on for years, with no sign of Nan.

We had a dog called Sport. Back then, I might walk down to Straitsview or Hay Cove to visit the girls, or just to hang around. I might have been sixteen or seventeen. It happened one night I was all alone, and when I bent down, the dog’s nose hit me right on the back of the calf, and down I went! She jumped right on me, licking my face. I didn’t know what to do; it was dark and I couldn’t see, and I thought, this is Nan for sure. Then it come to me, this was Sport! Now, don’t you say I wasn’t a happy man, though, after it was all over. I grabbed the dog by the hair and said, “Come on, let’s go home.”

Another night I left home on the other side of the harbour; I was going with Eliza then. I was coming home alone, and the fog was right down on the land, about six or seven feet high.

The sea was calm and I was going along, in the grass, on the gravel, in the grass, just weaving along in the nighttime. And the once, something hit me smack in the chest, and I fell back, staggering. Well, now, I thought, this is Nan!

But, you know what it was? We used to have a brook house; a little, small house built over the well. Never painted; the siding was weathered with the wind, and this is what I slapped right into.

Oh, my, oh my! Every hair was standing up on my head.

But, I think it is safe to say that Nan is not coming back. I guarantee you that!

After Whyman’s Death

Whyman died in August, and the next year, I don’t know if it was July



Figure 3 On the wharf

or August, I looked and seen his head coming up over the strouters; the ladder that goes down from the edge of the wharf to the boat. And when I saw him, I said, “Oh, my God!” and I ran. He come right up on the deck of the wharf, and I run. I suppose it was my imagination, just thinking about him. It was a good while before I got over his death.

Uncle George Decker

Now! Uncle George Decker. I could tell you stories for three days about what he was like. It was nothing for Uncle George to be coming around the bay with his gun on his back, in the dark, and to heave off a turn of lumber, smack, right at his feet.

Another time Uncle George was hauling wood down in Muddy Cove. Uncle Jack Edison from Hay Cove,

he seen the Brown Man at Uncle George Decker’s komatik. One minute the Brown Man would be up at the nose of the komatik, then he’d be at the back, so Uncle George couldn’t get the komatik to move; no sir! Uncle George couldn’t get her started. Uncle Jack was watching, and he could see two men: Uncle George and the Brown Man, and once the Brown Man left, the dogs had no trouble starting up.

Glossary

Dictionary of Newfoundland English

1. Time: A ‘time’ is a party or celebration, especially a communal gathering with dancing, entertainment.

2. Komatik: A long sled, adopted in northern Newfoundland for winter travel and hauled by dogs or sometimes men; sledge for hauling wood; ESKIMO SLED.

3. Strouters: One of several heavy posts placed vertically to support and strengthen the head of a fishing stage or wharf.

4. Turn of lumber: as much lumber as he could carry on his shoulder in one load.