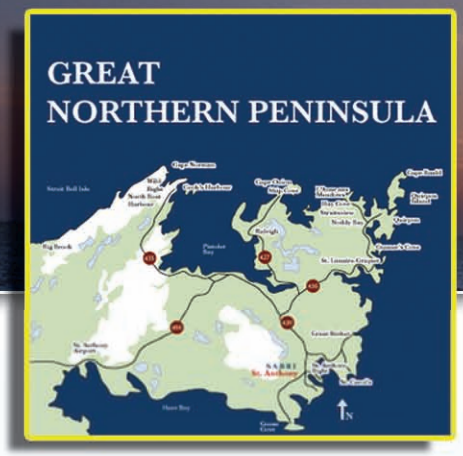

Noddy Bay

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.

Memories of Noddy Bay

Fanny Mitchell

Fanny Edison was born in 1932 and was one of the children of midwife Aunt Lucy Edison of Noddy Bay. As a young woman, Fanny worked in Cartwright, Labrador, as a nurse's aide for three years before returning to the place of her birth. Fanny married Frank Mitchell and together they raised four children: Denley, Rick, Alf and Roxanne.

Mrs. Mitchell's memories of her mother, Aunt Lucy, are of her being away from the house for nine days at a time, returning each evening to spend time with her own family. "Some of my sisters were old enough to look after the house when Mom took up midwifery," recalls Mrs. Mitchell.

Mrs. Mitchell says of her husband, "Frank was a fisherman but he should have been a craftsman all his life. I think his work is very good; he never should have went fishing at all. He built the Matthew and the Snorri. He has also made dories and small boats for the youngsters, and builds lighthouses, too."

Fanny's mother's story falls under the heading of Midwives in this Community History Project.

Figure 1 Frank & Fanny Mitchell holding a picture of their children

Figure 2 Frank Mitchell is a craftsman, creating anything from small dories for children, to boats such as the *Matthew* and the *Snorri*

Memory snapshots of Noddy Bay

William "Billy Quinton" Bartlett

William T. Bartlett, known locally as Billy Bartlett, is first and foremost an artist, but he likes to talk about the history of the area and says much of it lies beneath the waves of Noddy Bay, citing various sunken vessels that met their end in these waters. Mr. Bartlett, an advocate for tourism, suggests we should use the history we already have, use the products that are indigenous to the region, to create tourism on the northern peninsula. Mr. Bartlett has ideas about how

people in the area can produce products or services that tourists will pay money for. Mr. Bartlett, who paints Newfoundland scenery and portraits, understands working with his hands. "Your hands can bring in money," he says.

Figure 1 Painting of the Grenfell House by Billy Bartlett

When it comes to tourism, Billy Bartlett – who has worked at Norstead for a number of years – learns all he can about his subject, saying tour guides should enjoy what they do, it's what tourists expect. Previously, he has worked at L'Anse aux Meadows transforming himself from into Lambi the Viking at Norstead. It's not only important to play the part, he says, but to possess real knowledge of the Vikings. When tourists ask how many rivets are in the Snorri, for instance, a tour guide should be able to answer knowledgeably.

"The first woman to travel around the world – Gudrid – had her first European baby in L'Anse aux Meadows. Just that little bit of knowledge, or history, is enough to attract people to the area," he says. "You could have Snorri dolls and anything and everything associated with Snorri."

Mr. Bartlett plans to write and illustrate a children's book about Snorri, the first Viking child born in L'Anse aux Meadows and, he adds, "What I would like to have is a building with a woodwork shop, and another with materials, and another for painting. Add some people who have ideas and like to work with their hands, and I'd be happy to oversee their work. I have experience working with large groups and with individuals."

First memories
The Grenfell Orphanage

In the winter, many years ago, my parents traveled to Port Hope Simpson or Canada Bay to cut logs. My oldest sister was named Hope Viola, because she was born in Port Hope Simpson, the first white baby ever born there.

My father died before I was born. Wilfred Grenfell had a sawmill in Canada Bay and that's where my parents were working; they were living in a cabin. And my father froze to death. So, what happens when your husband freezes to death in a snowstorm and you have five small children? What do you do if you live in a makeshift house or you live in a cabin belonging to a company? What do you do? Everybody else around had five to eight kids. At first, every one of my brothers and sisters went to live with someone else, but that didn't work too well. My mother was a seamstress, so she went off to St. John's to work for White's Clothing, who made clothes for the war. So, when I was five I went to live with Uncle Lance and Aunt Dorcas.

I'm partial to the Grenfell. I lived five years at the Grenfell Orphanage; it was my first home. My father died in March and I was born the following August in a little shack, delivered by my Gran. After six weeks we all went in the orphanage. Mom won't even talk about it. I was the smartest little kid in that orphanage because I went there when I was six weeks old and I knew my way around. I was handed around by all the doctors, and Dr. and Mrs. Brown, who were directors at the orphanage, wanted to adopt me. I don't think people realize what that five years at the orphanage instilled in me.

Figure 2 The Quinton Family at the Grenfell Orphanage L-R Wilson, Mrs. Quinton and baby Billy, Joy and Scott (one sister, Hope, is missing from photo)

A new home for Billy Quinton

The first time I arrived in Noddy Bay, Aunt Dorcas had me on her lap in the komatik box, covered over with a quilt because I was afraid of the dogs. When I got off the ko-

matik box, Sadie Pilgrim – she was there with Melv and Guy and Shirley – said, "Oh, my dear! Poor little Billy, look, from the orphanage up in St. Anthony. Look, he got blue eyes and blond hair and his father froze to death in the snowstorm. And he's coming to live with Lance and Dorcas and they're going to give him food and clothes to wear and a place to live."

And I thought that was all I was going to get. I can remember being afraid; all of a sudden I felt something like icy fingers going through me; I was afraid that I was really on my own; their only concern was that I was going to be clothed and have food and a place to sleep. I knew, at the age of five, that I didn't really belong to these people.

People say, "You can't remember that, you were only five!" But I can remember! I remember seeing a big yellow house with a red bunkhouse next door. In the front of that yellow house was a veranda. Round the veranda were all kinds of herbs and things growing: little flowers like snow were all around the house. The window facing towards the sun had blue and burnt amber stained glass. Near that window was a staircase and I used to pretend I was in an Arabian tent, because the light coming in through the window would make all these colours. I'd be there, with all kinds of imagination, and reading.

I also remember going upstairs and Aunt Dorcas showing me the bed that Uncle Lance had made for me; he had painted it lime green. He had laced it up with brand new rope for springs, and they put a feather bed on it. The problem was, after a year or so, my arse was on the floor. I would go in and I would just 'envelope'; I would hide away. And Aunt Dorcas had a piece of birch wood carved out that she would put in the oven; that was always in my bed before I went to bed, to keep me warm.

Uncle Lance was my second cousin, and my uncle, and my adoptive father. He was all three.

They had taken me out of a nursery at the Grenfell Orphanage that I was sharing with other boys and put me in a little tiny bedroom by myself, which was very frightening; very scary. And they were strangers, too. But I didn't complain, and I didn't let people know how frightened I was.

But I remember all the kindness of everybody.

When I was very young

When I was young, I read five or more books a week, and I knew my letters. When I went to school in Noddy Bay, my first year of school, I remember the teacher asked me the alphabet. Uncle Lance had a shareman, and I never walked around Noddy Bay, the shareman carried me around on his shoulders and was there to pick me up at the end of the day if the ice was in and we couldn't row across the harbour. So, when the teacher asked me if I knew the alphabet, I recited it backwards. Some kids didn't like me because I was so smart, but they weren't concerned that I was going through this thing where they all had parents and I had none. They had real parents; I was just being cared for.

Each one of Uncle Lance's sharemen took me as a possession; they all loved me, and they all looked after me. Down in the beach, Heber Eddison would get lumpfish – you can only eat a certain kind, red or yellow, I'm not sure – and he used to make soup with sculpin tails for me. Now, since then I've learned that's what the French used to have, Sculpin tail soup; that was delicious – so, why can't someone introduce an historic thing like sculpin tail soup to the tourists? There are lots of sculpins down on the beach.

Every summer we'd go bakeapple picking and try to catch a cod and we'd make fisherman's brewis; it's the saltwater that makes it taste good. It's better if you eat it while you're on the salt water.

George Andrews is my uncle. He was the youngest one to rescue Sir Wilfred Grenfell from the ice floe. I lived with him. I was an inquisitive little boy, and Uncle George loved that. He was the only man who hugged me; picked me up and hugged me; he was blind, see? And he'd say, "Billy boy, you're some handsome. You'll shoot all them girls full of holes." And that felt some good to hear him say that.

Isaac Bartlett: lay minister

Isaac Bartlett had married Agnes Pilgrim in 1902. The Bartletts hadn't had a baby in the house for about twenty-five years, and I was just as vocal then as I am now. In that same house lived Uncle Lance and Aunt Dorcas, and I was like gold to them. Now they had me, five years old, and I wouldn't shut up, and they couldn't have this going on with Mr. Isaac Bartlett. Mr. Bartlett was the lay preacher, and he buried everybody, married everybody, and christened everybody. He would get up in the

morning and sit in a rocking chair by the stove with creases in his pants and creases in his sealskin boots, with his white shirt on, generally a tie on, waiting for someone to be born, to get married, or to die.

Mother Goose beneath the staircase

Aunt Dorcas, to keep me quiet, taught me how to sew, to hook rugs, to do anything that could be done inside of a house. She taught me to read, and I knew every Mother Goose story off by heart. In Noddy Bay, I had this whole staircase to myself and underneath it was full of books and they had a glass cut window that was blue so I imagined it was an Arabian tent. When it came to books, I went through everything you could imagine that was possible to read. Underneath the staircase there were tons of books and, after I arrived from the orphanage, Grenfell kept sending them down to me.

Then there were books that came from Europe by schooner; the Bartletts brought them over. A lot of my books came from the Rockefeller Center. The first time I went to New York I got off the train and I had to go right to the Rockefeller Center...just had to go...walked right up the steps of the Rockefeller Center because my books was given to me by Rockefeller.

RCMP looking for Billy Quinton

The most frightening experience for me at Noddy Bay was when I was ten. I was down around the stage on the beach in Noddy Bay – with a group of boys, you know – and they were always telling me I was bad because I was assertive and outgoing.

One day, in come an RCMP boat, in the harbour. "Does anybody know where young Billy Quinton lives?" announced a very loud voice. The Mountie had a little grey speaker on top of the boat, you see. And somebody said to me, "They're going to get you now! They're going to put you away." I was really frightened. Well, he walked by and nobody said anything, and he went on up to the house with these briggs on – riding breeches – he had boots on up to his knee, and the briggs and the riding crop, and the round hat on his head and brass buttons down his tunic, and a briefcase under his arm, and went up switching his leg with the crop all the way over the hill.

And I watched from there and I said, "Oh, I hope he never recognized me!" *(Bill throws back his head and laughs heartily at the memory.)*

We went up and they sent down a couple of sharemen for me; Uncle Lance had sharemen, you see. I came on in and sat to the table, and the first thing he said was I was going to have my name changed, and I said, "I don't want my name changed; I want to keep my name." He said, "You have nothing to say about it." Anyway, they did all the paperwork, and then he put his riding crop to my nose and he said, "You keep that nose clean or you know where you'll go. You'll go into the clink!" And from that time on, I always wanted to go in the clink.

I tell you, up until I was about fourteen or fifteen I used to have nightmares like nobody else ever had. I would never tell nobody. You see, I was of the opinion that I was quite happy with Uncle Lance and he was so good to me and he loved me and took care of me, that

Figure 3 Young man pronging codfish

I didn't want to create any problems; they had enough problems taking care of me, so I wouldn't tell them about my nightmares; I loved them and didn't want to hurt them. I was the little boy whose father froze to death in a snowstorm. When I heard them talking about my father's death, I used to be flinching. I didn't want to be the little boy whose father froze to death in a snowstorm. I wanted my own mommy and my own daddy. Sometimes I felt so empty, so lost.

The opening of Harriot Curtis Collegiate & Premier Joey Smallwood

Harriot Curtis Collegiate was the first school on the Northern Peninsula. In September 1962, when the school opened, I was the Master of Ceremonies. I got up and intro-

duced the Premier, Joey Smallwood. On the way out, Mr. Smallwood said, "Young man, that was a fine speech. If you ever need me, just phone me, I'll know who you are." Years later, the year the Ranger went down, we had some problem with a relative they decided to put into a children's home, and I needed to get custody. I picked up the phone and phoned Joey, and he said, "Hey, I know who you are. You're that young fellow from St. Anthony who was the Master of Ceremonies at Harriet Curtis Collegiate!" So Joey got his son, Bill Smallwood, who was out on the road, to come back and within the hour the nephew was in my custody. Just like that.

Stories out of Noddy Bay

Merchants

Many people think fishing started to die in 1992, but somewhere around 1952-1953 it started to die. The Bartletts employed – you can ask anybody in Noddy Bay or Straitsview – just about everybody's father or grandfather worked for Isaac Bartlett as sharemen.

The Bartletts had a little shop – a little red shop. One day a local fellow walked around the harbour and came to the store. "Dorcas, maid," he said. "I need two plugs of Beaver tobacco." The tobacco was compressed, and it could be cut up and loosened and then rolled up to make cigarettes. The plugs were right hard, solid, and they were fifty cents each. Dorcas went around behind the counter and he said, "Well, Dorcas, maid, I got to go back around the harbour now." (And that would be a long ways). And she said, "Why?"

"Because Buddy gave me fifty cents, and I got me own fifty cents, and I put them in the same pocket and I don't know which is mine and which is his, so I got to go back and find out which it is."

Figure 4 His environment strongly influenced Billy's art

The Barrelman

Lance Bartlett was a merchant in Noddy Bay. When I was a little boy, the Post Office was in our house and the telegraph was in our house, and we had the only community telephone. We had the only RCA radio – the bunkhouse had a wind-charger up on top of it so that the battery every day was taken out and charged – and when the Barrelman come on, well, I had to shut up. The Barrelman was Joey Smallwood; he'd give the news in the evening. So, everybody would walk around the harbour and come over to listen to the news. They would sit with their caps on their knees and cough and say, "Yes, boy and yes, boy." It was absolutely wonderful.

Aunt Suse Lacey and the telephone

I remember Suse Lacey coming down from Hay Cove, and one day saying (we had the only telephone in Noddy Bay – there was a wire from the house to the telephone pole outside), "My, Dorcas! You must have some muscles in your legs."

Aunt Dorcas said, "Why, Suse?"

"Climbing up that pole to get a message, and climbing back up to give an answer."

Aunt Suse and the Radio

One day Aunt Suse came down and we had this great big radio, which was over three feet tall, and it had a six-volt battery on it. There were times people would come down to the store and listen to the radio and have a cup of tea. So, Suse came down one day, and said, "Lance, if I got behind that radio do you think me relatives would hear me up around Conception Bay?"

"Yes, Suse," said Uncle Lance, "they would."

She said, "Are you sure now?"

He said, "I tell you what, Suse, I'll get me violin."

So she got down behind the radio and Uncle Lance got the violin – he was always devilish and I'm a lot like that, too – and Uncle Lance began to play and she was just putting her to it, singing all these songs behind the radio.

Aunt Anne Pilgrim, midwife

Aunt Anne was a midwife around here – she delivered one thousand four hundred babies. I remember I came down here when she was in the hospital, before she died. When I went to visit her, she said, "Come over here," and she stuck her finger into my navel and she said, "Yup, you're Billy. I delivered you." And she said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I come to see you." She said, "You come down to see me?" I said, "I didn't come down to see you, but I'm here and I dropped by to see you."

"Well," she said, "I'm leaving the planet. I can't wait to leave; I've been here too long." That's the kind of person she was.

Admiral Perry's Pocket Watch

Figure 5 Pocketwatch

Admiral Perry had some kind of partner in the Philadelphia Railway. Now, on the pocket watch, engraved on the back is a big iron train, and on the front is a porcelain one. It still works. If you look real close at the porcelain train on the front, you'll see that it's heading north, while the southbound track has a little "S" on it, I think. The watch works perfect, and its stainless steel. Isaac Bartlett gave it to me; his father was Frederick. Frederick and his wife, Salina, were originally from Herring Neck, Notre Dame Bay.

The French threw rocks

In Newfoundland, when everybody started to move, first they went to Trinity – the English – then they got to Bonavista, then they got up towards Twillingate. And then from Twillingate they came here. There's a wonderful story – like in 1776 – about the French coming in with their cutlasses and their pistolets. There were eight families of fishermen in St. Lunaire – the French sent them flying – burnt their stages and their wharves. Grandmother Pilgrim used to say that she and her brother, Uncle Billy Pynn, used to go fishing, and the French used to throw rocks at them because they were on their fishing grounds.

The Dog Team Tavern, Vermont

Much later, when I was a man, my son and I were down in the Dog Team Tavern in Vermont (It burned down September 1, 2006). Anyway, we were in having dinner, and I didn't say anything about Grenfell, and my son said, "Father, you must know something about this; they got dog teams there, and look at that little Eskimo jacket with the fur on it." I said, "Son, go over, lift up the corner underneath and see whose name is written on it."

He went up and said, "Father, look! It says Billy Quinton! It's yours!"

I told him that Grenfell used to wait till his female dog had pups and, when their eyes opened, he would kill them and stuff them. He put them on a long board, had a little komatik made, and added the harness. There was one of the stuffed dog teams in the Dog Team Tavern. Real puppies. They looked like little tiny toy dogs. He made several of those.

Painting of St. Anthony

Figure 6 Boats at the dock in St. Anthony from right to left: The Maravel, the Gull Pond, the RCMP boat (grey) and the Anglican boat. The picture is from the Mission side taken towards the east of St. Anthony. In the picture, a part of the government wharf is visible.

The Catholics from Fortune

The Catholics from Fortune and the Catholics from Goose Cove used to visit the Catholics on Cape Bauld. Do you know how you could tell the women? The women, according to the Catholic religion, weren't allowed to wear slacks and, if they did, they had to wear something like a dress over their pants. So, they used to make – out of flour

sacks and sugar sacks – these bright blue things with elastics through them that they'd pull on like skirts. Sometimes you'd see a dog team going across with a red and a green: one woman had a green one on and one woman had a red one on and another had a yellow one. People would say, "There are the Catholics from Goose Cove or Fortune or Cape Bauld."

The fold-away organ

Mr. Bartlett has a collapsible organ which was passed down to him from his Uncle Lance. He explains how it works:

Figure 7 the fold-away organ

The organ collapses, the lathe comes up and goes down, and it's like a little trunk; it was made in Vermont around 1837. The company that made this made the big pipe organs for churches in Montreal, New York and, even in Europe. Uncle Lance used to come in and say, "Come on, Billy-boy, we're going up to the church service, two o'clock!" We'd collapse it and put it on the komatik with the dog team; I'd sit on it and off we'd go."

Bill Bartlett sits down to the organ and plays three hymns: Have Thine Own Way Lord, He Touched Me, and Roll Out the Lifeline.

There is so much music that locally – even these gospel tunes – could be put together for dinner presentations. Tourists would be lined up to hear them. I know all these gospel tunes and I play the guitar and saxophone. I've had a living room full of people listening to my music, and they enjoyed it so much.

Eating chocolate with Helge and Anne Ingstad

I was here with Helge Ingstad and Anne Stine as a boy, sitting and eating their chocolates; mostly I ate them because they had red paper on them. I used to sit off to one side because they were doing something important. I got to meet them at the house because they tied up to our wharf, which was next to the one in Quirpon.

Hand-carved dragons

The Vikings used to have his and hers sides of the bed. They carved the bed posts with a dragon on each side. Look at the difference between the dragon heads: (see picture below). And you think we're smart now with his and hers towels.

Figure 8 Billy Bartlett carved these Viking 'chair posts' by hand: his (left) and hers (right)

If you look real close you will see that one side has a flower, like a bow, in the hair, and the other side doesn't. But, instead of bedposts I'm making chair posts. The wood is birch. It'll be a tall-back chair. It'll be made in such a way that it can be taken apart and carried around with you, and when you stop you get out of your boat and put it together with little pegs, and you got your chair made.

Glossary
Dictionary of Newfoundland English

1. Sculpin: scavenger fish
2. Komatik: A long sled for hauling wood (and sometimes passengers), usually pulled by dogs.