



Raleigh

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.

Raleigh Water Taxi

EDMOND & MILLICENT TAYLOR

Just a compass and the time

Navigation has come a long way in the past forty years, but when Edmund Taylor operated a mail boat in Raleigh in the 1960s and 1970s, piloting his thirty-foot, decked-in trap skiff through the north Atlantic waters, all he had for navigational equipment was a compass and the time, and a 1545 Acadia motor to power her.

With no radar and no depth sounders, Mr. Taylor resorted to simpler measures to navigate from one community to another. “In the beginning, what I done, I had a little notebook. On a fine day, I’d leave Raleigh and steer for the center of the bight, just keep sight of land – and I’d time it from there, till we’d alter course to go down along the shore and turn in at the Onion, and then I’d alter course again. We’d leave Ship Cove and steer down for L’Anse aux Meadow tickle, and all the way around. And each time I altered course, I’d write down how



Figure 1 Edmund Taylor navigated his mail boat in nights as black as pitch

long it took; I’d time it. And I went dozens of times around Pistolet Bay where there were all rocks and

shoals; sometimes in the middle of the night when it was as black as pitch.”

Canada Post Mail Boat

Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds. Inscription found on the General Post Office in New York City at 8th Avenue and 33rd Street.

When Edmund Taylor was first contracted by Canada Post to deliver mail by boat, the roads had just gone through and he was already taking people back and forth in the trap skiff. He carried the mail from Raleigh to Ship Cove, Straitsview, Quirpon, Griquet, St. Lunaire, Brehat, St. Anthony Bight, and St. Anthony. “We’d pick up the mail and call at every port on the way back, twice a week. We’d leave at three o’clock in the morning and get back probably around midnight,” he recalls.

The mail boat went in all weather. “There’d be the biggest, blackest cloud, but we’d still go on.”

There were more than a few close brushes with danger, when the shoals and the lops threatened the lives of those on board, says Mr. Taylor. “There were times we had a lot of wind. I know one time we was coming down from St. Anthony and when we turned to go in Brehat, the wind was on the starboard quarter, and lops going in – there’s a shoal just outside Brehat called the Mel-low Shoal – there was a lop broke on her, and I had the ventilators in-

side the engine house, and when the lop broke over, the water got down on the engine and she cut out; stopped. I pressed the button to start her and she wouldn’t go. I punched and punched and punched the battery down and she wouldn’t hardly turn over; she was just grinding. I got down with the crank; we was right alongside the shoal – and I took the crank and heaved it, and she caught. I got up and put her in gear, and she just stayed going long enough to go around the shoal. If there had been another big wave it would have put us right on the rocks. That was a close call! But I got her around.”

As soon as they were clear of the shoal, Mr. Taylor got to work and cleaned up the engine, wiped it off, and got the trap skiff aimed for Brehat.

“After we left Brehat, we come on down to Griquet, and the sea was foaming right across up there to Upper Griquet, what they calls the White Cape. Anyway, we come out, and when we come out we left Griquet and went in under the bridge in Dark Tickle. Then, coming down from Quirpon, there’s a shoal out there – Tempest Point – and we was coming out there – I kept off outside the shoal, but there was one wave that took the boat and, man oh man, that wave was coming on full speed! When it broke, the boat passed through and under, and when she fell, I thought the engine and everything was gone down through the bottom of her; I thought she was gone for sure. Well, boy, what a smack!

The engine stopped, and I said, “Boy, what’s happening?” Anyway, I got her going and we come on. We went into Quirpon and I said

to Lem, “Boy, this is as far as we’re going. We’re staying here.” But Lem was a bit stubborn and he didn’t want to stop, not even for something to eat. “Well,” I said, “If you’re not going to stop for something to eat, and you’re not going to stay here, well, we’ll go on.” So, we sailed back to Raleigh and once we were on the other side of the peninsula it wasn’t so bad anyway.

Another time, Mr. Taylor went to Labrador, just north of Bateau, and tells this story. “We went out one morning and there was a northeast wind and a sea on, and boats ahead of us and boats behind. Then came a big swell, and we was going on



Figure 2 Mr. and Mrs. Taylor in front of their home and stage

full speed; just watching the radar as we were going out. Up come the swell, and I give it to her and I looked around and didn’t know nothing till I felt the boat rise up on the wave and then down she went! Bang! Right down on her bow! Everything – dishes and everything – crashed on the floor and broke. We just stood there, watching the dishes smashing. Everything come out of the bunks. Bang! Crash! It was the same as if we went over a cliff.

But we thought no more of it;

picked up the broken crockery and went on fishing and, when we were done fishing, come back home to Raleigh. Next spring, I down to check the engine, and that’s when I discovered that where she smacked she broke off three motor mountings and went down and lodged on the keelson!

Water taxi

While Mr. Taylor was operating as a mail boat with Canada Post two days a week, he also operated a water taxi of sorts. “People traveling would take advantage of the mail schedule; they knew we were on a fixed schedule. If we was going for the mail and someone wanted to go down the shore – agents, or Mounties, or fish buyers; whoever wanted a ride; that was the only way to get around then – they’d go with us. If someone caught a ride when I was delivering the mail I didn’t charge them to ride along. There were times, if they wanted to make a special trip, we might charge them something.” And, it was in

the process of carrying auditors, men who audited the books of all the local businesses – that the mail



Figure 3 Edmund Taylor’s Mail Boat

boat was given the name *Rainbow*.

So, the *Rainbow* carried auditors, bishops, expectant mothers, and the sick. There were times late at night when Edmund would hear the phone ringing, and he’d have to get out of bed to take someone to the hospital or across the bay. But it was all part of the job.



Figure 4 Capelin drying in the sun

Family and retirement

Very few people in the outport communities on the northern peninsula ever really retire, and Edmund Taylor and wife, Millicent, are no exception. Their home in Raleigh is perched on the side of a rocky outcropping overlooking Ha Ha Bay with a riot of poppies running a circle around the house. Edmund has spent months, weeks, days and hours restoring the old stage and wharves in front of his home and has been assisted by his wife, Millicent. Alongside the stage flakes of capelin are drying in the sun.

Millicent, who seems to be as smart as a whip and never lacks for something pithy to say, claims she never darkened the door of a school till she worked at the Raleigh school as a janitor. “When I was in Big Brook, Uncle Jim Diamond learned me how to spell and to read the Royal Readers, and them Royal Readers is better than some of them



Figure 5 Boats are a part of life in Raleigh

grade eleven books kids is reading now,” she says.

Edmund laughs. “Next year it’ll be fifty years since we’ve been married. First time ever I seen Millicent in my life was at Cook’s Harbour when I was over there fishing. One Sunday, me and Ern Elliott went up to Uncle Len Smith’s and Millicent was there. When we come out, Ern said, “What do you think of that one?”

I said, “By the jeez, boy, if I catches that one by herself sometime, I’m going to have a smack at her.” Next time I seen her was in Big Brook when Alf Evans drove down to visit his girlfriend. I went along – wearing my old work clothes – and Alf and his girl, and Millicent and I, went for a drive in Alf’s truck. Not long after that we got married, moved to Raleigh, and raised four children. That’s how we started, and that’s how we ended up where we are today.”



Figure 6
Edmund and Millicent on their wedding day

Glossary American heritage science dictionary

1. Bight: A long, gradual bend or curve in a shoreline. A bight can be larger than a bay, or it can be a segment of a bay.

Dictionary of Newfoundland English

1. Tickle: a narrow salt-water strait, as in an entrance to a harbour or between islands or other land masses, often difficult or treacherous to navigate because of narrowness, tides.
2. Lops: The rough surface of the sea caused by a stiff wind and marked by a quick succession of short breaking waves.

Simon Grinham Seventh Son

GAYE COLBOURNE

This is a story about Gaye Colbourne's great grandfather, Simon Grinham, who lived in Raleigh. According to stories passed down by word of mouth, he was the seventh son of a seventh son and had healing powers. Ms. Colbourne says her uncle Simon was a short, stocky fellow and was a great story teller; he liked to tell tall tales.



Figure 1 Simon Grinham, fifth man from the left. Photo courtesy of Gaye Colbourne

Family tree

Alfred Grinham married Sarah Ann at Brandy Island and they had a son, Simon, born October 1864 at Cook's Harbour. Simon married Ruth Patience Bessey from L'Anse aux Meadows. They had a daughter, Christina, born July 22, 1905 at Brandy Harbour. Christina married Elijah Thomas Greene, who was

born August 29, 1905 at Raleigh; he was a fisherman. Elijah and Christina had a son, Henry Whitfield Greene, born May 12, 1924, a fisherman. He married Irene Beatrice Bessey of Raleigh, and their daughter is Miriam Gaye Greene, who was born June 8, 1962, and is a registered nurse. She is married to Richard Colbourne of St. Anthony. The Colbournes reside in St. Anthony and have one son, Neil.

Simon Grinham died in 1946.

The story of Simon Grinham By Gaye Colbourne

Simon Grinham, as the story goes, was the seventh son of a seventh son, and apparently there is some native blood in his ancestry. It is a known fact that he could stop bleeding and heal the sick. Although he couldn't read or write, he read the Scriptures in the Bible. My mother, Beatrice (Bessey) Greene, had very bad nose bleeds when she was a little girl. My Uncle Edward would have to go to Simon's house and tell him about her nose bleeds. Uncle Simon would say her full name and, before Edward would get back home, which was next door, her nose bleed would be stopped.

Another time, Uncle Edward Bessey went down to Gull Cove bird hunting, and accidentally shot off his little finger. He was about thirteen or fourteen years old at the time. He went to the St. Anthony Hospital where he stayed for about a month. He was home for a few days when a blood poison streak began to go up his arm. His father took him back to the hospital and the doctor wanted to amputate. His father wasn't satisfied, so he came home and brought Edward to see Uncle Simon. He made salves from berries and certain roots, and ground sugar into a fine powder

to put on Uncle Edward's hand. Simon did this every day until it had completely healed, and Uncle Edward did not lose his arm.

Another occasion was when Aunt Florrie and Uncle Edward were chopping splits in the house. Aunt Florrie was holding onto the split and Uncle Edward accidentally chopped her finger. Simon was napping on the daybed at the time. He got up, saw what happened, touched her cut finger and the bleeding stopped.

There was a verse in the Bible he would chant when healing people; sometimes it was like he was in a trance.

His house smelled of dried roots and medicine, and there were plants and roots hung to dry all around. He wouldn't accept payment or anything for helping others.

Apparently, he could pass the healing charm or healing powers on to someone, but that someone had to be a female. The female would then have to pass the healing power on to a male. Also, the healing power could not be passed to a relative. Uncle Simon wanted to pass it on to Aunt Florrie, but she wouldn't do it.



Figure 2 Photo courtesy of Gaye Colbourne

Lost and Found!

WINSTON ELLIOTT

A young man

Winston Elliott is sixty years old, but thirty-five years ago, in 1974, he was a lean and wiry young man with a full beard who enjoyed salmon fishing, cutting and hauling wood, snaring rabbits, and sealing.

He owes his life to a woman named Sarah (Sadie) Evans, a spinster who had lived in Raleigh and knew him from his youth. It's not unusual for a caring woman to rescue a young man from the jaws of death, but when the heroine herself is already dead and buried, then that makes the rescue a matter of grave interest.

Raleigh in 1974

When the wind blows from the northeast, it sweeps across the Labrador Sea, bringing the snow in off the sea ice and, whether it blows in from the northeast or from the west, it funnels between Burnt Island to the west and Ha Ha Mountain to the east, creating a channeling effect which intensifies its power. Even on a sunny winter day, if there's a westerly wind and any snow around, it's white-out conditions.

If you examine a topographical map, it almost seems as if Burnt Island, locally named Raleigh Cape, is shaped like a thumb, while the peninsula that points northeastward to Ship Cove is like a finger, and nestled along the eastern side of the inside junction of that thumb and finger is Raleigh, which was incorporated as a town in 1973.

At one time Raleigh was named

Ha Ha Bay by the French and there is speculation that they named it thus when they discovered an almost – hidden isthmus, or neck, joining the 'island' to the mainland, thus necessitating a long sail around the northerly point of Burnt Cape to Pistolet Bay in the west, instead of sailing right through Ha Ha Bay. In March 1914 the name Ha Ha Bay was officially changed to Raleigh.

In the past few years the Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve has drawn people from around the world who come to study rare plants that are indigenous to this area of Newfoundland, as well as the Burnt Cape Cinquefoil, which grows nowhere else in the world except at Burnt Island. Locally, Burnt Island is called Raleigh Cape, and is comprised of approximately 80 percent barren, limestone rock, while approximately 20 percent of the 'island' – the southwest corner – is treed with spruce and low-growing shrubs. There are deep ravines gouged out of the limestone and the cliffs are steep, plunging from a 250-foot summit to the pounding sea below.

The church key

Saturday, February 8, 1974, was a fine day with the temperature hovering at the zero mark and the snow lying deep and still on the ground. Winston Elliott had no idea as he sat down to his noon meal that he would soon be in the grip of a blizzard that would challenge him to the limit of his endurance. Winston's uncle and aunt, Gersh and Audrey Elliott, were the community church caretakers, so when Uncle Gersh arrived at the door and asked Winston to take his ski-doo

and run down to Ern Taylor's house to get the church key, Winston jumped on his ski-doo and headed for the Taylor household located at the southern end of Raleigh.

Enroute, he stopped by his friend Willie Taylor's place to play a game or two of Five Hundreds, and so engaged was he in the game that an hour slipped by before he looked up and saw the snow falling thick and fast outside. He couldn't even see the nearest house, just fifty yards away. Jumping up, he exclaimed that he had to pick up the key and raced out the door to Ern Taylor's house, which was just three houses down the road, not more than a couple hundred yards away.

Once he had the church key, he jumped aboard his ski-doo and turned in a northeast direction to go home, fighting his way through the blizzard with fine snow whirling all around him; kneeling up on his ski-doo and vainly trying to claw the snow out of his eyes. He wasn't dressed for a blizzard, and the coat he wore didn't fit him properly because he was very tall and thin, so that the sleeves were halfway up his arms. The worsted mitts he wore were no match for the weather, and Winston was soon to discover he was no match for Mother Nature in all her fury. Soon, he was swallowed up in the snow and the wind, and eventually turned his ski-doo away from the blizzard to take shelter from the bite of wind and snow. It wasn't long before he had turned full-circle, with the wind at his back, and was driving over the wharf and over two stacks of lobster pots that lay buried under deep snow along the shore. Soon, he had left Raleigh behind and was headed southwest across the isthmus, or

neck, out into the wide expanse of Pistolet Bay.

Winston's friend, Willie Taylor, says that any ordinary man would have stopped at that point, but not Winston; he just kept going. The ski-doo labored over the rough ice and, through the curtain of snow, Winston was able to see that there were patches of open water, and skirted around them, trying to sight land. Minutes seemed like hours. Finally, with a bump and a groan his ski-doo died, its nose buried under a large piece of ice. After hours of driving aimlessly through the storm, the machine was frozen and out of gas.

Night had settled in, but the white snow whirled around him and the wind howled. Winston looked up and saw something immense looming out of the storm; something that dwarfed him, and realized he had come up right alongside the west side of Raleigh Cape at a place called Falaise Point, known locally as Gauge Point. With mittened hands he took hold of the rock on the cliff face and began to pull himself upwards, one hand at a time, one foot at a time. How he made it to the top of the ice and snow-covered cliff in a blizzard he can't say, but eventually he pulled himself up over and began to walk across the cape. If the wind and snow had been fierce out on the bay, how much worse must it have been on top of Raleigh Cape, exposed to everything nature could serve up?

Most of Raleigh Cape is barren, but Winston hugged the tree line, knowing it would lead him closer to the town of Raleigh on the other side. Unfortunately, the trees and shrubs and ravines which were so

picturesque in summertime were treacherous in winter; full of soft



Figure 1 Winston Elliott (Raleigh in background) 2009

snow that had drifted and leveled off, concealing gulches and deep hollows, which Winston fell into several times. Sometimes he fell in neck-deep, but managed to claw his way out and trudged on. "It was dark as a dungeon then," shivers Winston, remembering.



Figure 2 Winston Elliott as a young man

From the highest elevation on the cape, Winston suddenly spotted the lights of Raleigh, and hope flared

like a candle in the wind, and sputtered out just as quickly when he began to make his descent and couldn't see the lights anymore. It wasn't long before he had come up behind a fishing stage and a shed near the water's edge, belonging to Lewis Evans; Sadie Evans' brother.



Figure 3 Sadie Evans

Evans' shed, located across Ha Ha Bay from the town of Raleigh, was abandoned and locked up tight, much to Winston's dismay. He huddled behind the shed in the lee of the wind, rubbing his blistered, frozen wrists, trying to get warm. And now, not only was the cold biting at him, but he was terribly hungry and thirsty, and completely exhausted.

The search

Meanwhile, at six o'clock that night, Willie Taylor heard the phone ring. He had assumed Winston was at home, but when Winston's mother called and asked if he was there, Willie knew something was wrong. When Ern Taylor confirmed that Winston had picked up the key and had left for home, alarm bells rang in everybody's mind. Winston

was lost!

Suddenly the community sprang to life. Terry Smith, a youth of fourteen, watched from the window of his dad's house, and recalls that at nine o'clock it had cleared off enough that he could see all the snow machines out on the harbour. The ice had been all broken up, and the people thought Winston had gone out and went over the edge of the ice into the water.

Residents in the small community placed themselves in jeopardy searching for Winston, and in spite of howling winds and blowing snow, they fanned out in various areas around Raleigh, searching. Willie Taylor went along with a group of half a dozen men; anybody who had a ski-doo went looking because walking was impossible. "Even if we had found his ski-doo, we would have assumed he'd fallen through the ice; it's the first thing that came to our minds. Out on the bay it had been all water just a few days earlier."

At home, Willie's wife Sharon watched anxiously through the window, remembering that most people figured Winston didn't have a chance after dark. "But I thought it was better that he was out after dark; there was a chance he would see the lights of the community then."

Sadie intervenes

Behind Lewis Evans' shed, Winston girded himself up for the walk along the pathway leading home. He still had to walk past the Anglican cemetery, across the neck joining Raleigh Cape to the mainland, and then to the houses along the east side of the harbour. He could

feel the wind beginning to slacken and the snow didn't seem to be blowing as hard, but his feet in his boots felt like stumps and his wrists burned with the cold. Ice candles had formed on his eyebrows and eyelashes so that he could hardly see anymore, but he could see puffs of air coming from his mouth and covering his beard with ice crystals. He stumbled through the drift in what he thought was the right direction, but was brought up short, and stopped, because there, right in front of him, was Sadie Evans!

"You're going the wrong way!" she said. "Go for the light."

Winston looked and saw that he had veered off course and strayed into the Anglican cemetery, which was blanketed under mounds of snow. He realized that he was likely standing right on top of Sadie Evans' grave; she had been struck down by a car and killed in March the year before in St. Anthony, and her grave would have been just inside the gate of the cemetery. Sadie had now vanished as quickly as she

had appeared, but she had appeared long enough to warn him that he was headed right out over the neck of land and back out to Pistolet Bay. Had he kept going in that direction, he never would have made it home alive.

Winston took a few steps back and just a rifle-shot away he saw a light over the door of Elijah Taylor's house. Gladly, he stumbled towards the house and, a few minutes later, burst through the door. After he took off his outer clothes, Aunt Eve served him a good hot cup of tea and a biscuit, and Winston warmed up by the woodstove while Uncle Harve and Elijah made phone calls around the community. It wasn't long before Winston's brothers, Garl and Alvin, came to pick him up, and, "After a cup of tea, I was perfect!" grins Winston.

At home that night, Winston found the church key still in his pocket, and thought about all the trouble that had happened as a result of picking up that key, "But", he says, "I never gave up; I kept going. I never panicked; I just took my time. I figured somebody was out looking for me, but I figured they wouldn't know where to look for me; there were so many places I could have been."

Looking back

Terry Smith doesn't have all the answers to Winston's situation, but he has plenty of questions. "When you stop and think about it, what saved Winston? Was it the fact that he had the church key in his pocket? His getting lost could have been a real tragedy. Winston ended up out on the harbour ice on Pistolet Bay in a blizzard, but his snow ma-



Figure 4 Winston at Sadie's grave

chine ran out of gas before he got to the water's edge. Raleigh Cape is 250 feet high, three miles long and nearly a mile wide. How did he manage to climb up the cliffs in a blizzard without slipping down, and where did he get the strength to do it? How did he manage to travel towards Raleigh, instead of walking out over a cliff-edge and plunging to the ice below? And then, the storm lightened just as he got back to the place where he first got lost, so that he was able to see the light. Finally, he met someone in the cemetery who spoke to him and told him he was going in the wrong direction, and pointed him towards the light. Someone was watching over him."

Willie Taylor lives in Raleigh with his wife Sharon, and works with the Coast Guard Search and Rescue. "I work with people with hypothermia, and I can't see why Winston didn't exhibit signs of it. What happens with hypothermia is that your core gets cold, everything starts to shut down and you go into cardiac arrest. As long as you're shivering you're okay, but when you stop shivering that's when you're in danger."

Violet Tucker, Aunt Sadie Evans' niece, remembers her aunt. "She was a sweet lady. She would have known Winston and she knew the Elliott family. She was always there to help somebody and was a very caring person."

Peg Smith, Terry Smith's sister, sums it up with a ballad she wrote a short time after the incident.

The Winston Elliott Story A ballad by Peg Smith 1974

*It was February the 8th of '74
Worse than the Martin Hartwell
A ski-doo took off for the key of the
church
And the driver's name was Winston
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
North of a place called Raleigh
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
The Winston Elliott story.*

*He was so scared he rubbed his
beard
As if he was going to cry
He was standing there all alone
As if her were going to die
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
North of a place called Raleigh
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
The Winston Elliott story.*

*He wandered around until he found
A path going to the ocean
He spotted a light which was shin-
ing bright
And he thought that he could make
it
He walked and walked and heard a
noise
And out popped 'Lige with a few
tears in his eyes
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
North of a place called Raleigh
He was lost up in No-Man's-Land
The Winston Elliott story.*

Safe at home

The path Winston took will probably never be known, but his story has left him with the assurance that Someone brought him safely home when it was beyond the power of those who loved him to do so.



A tragic CHRISTMAS

By Leonard and Kathleen Tucker

Sixty years ago, the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula was as isolated as any place on God's earth. With the onset of winter, men had to work hard to feed their families. Many men chose to work with the fall seal fishery and moved to nearby communities, taking their boats and nets with them, and leaving their families behind. This is a story about four such men, their return to Raleigh for a wedding, and a sudden storm that nearly cost them all their lives.

Joe Pynn, Jack Taylor, George Allan Taylor and Jack Smith ran their operation out of L'Anse aux Meadows. They had established themselves in bunkhouses on Bleak Point, working during the day – setting, hauling and harvesting seals. The days were short and the nights were very long. To fill those long, dark nights, the men would sit around the woodstove and yam, play cards, or visit people in the community – men like George Decker.

In Raleigh on Dec. 21, 1943, a wedding party had been planned for a newly married couple, Gersham Bessey and Emma Jane Fowler. Gersh and Emma Jane had been married that morning in St. Anthony and were returning to Raleigh that evening. Their wedding reception would be a good reason for the community to gather together to celebrate with food and song.

Three men from Raleigh decided to make the trip to L'Anse aux Meadows to pick up the sealing crew to bring them home for the celebration (the sealing crew would take time out to celebrate the wedding, go back to L'Anse aux Meadows to finish out the week and return to Raleigh just before Christmas). These men were: 21-year old Norm Taylor, son of Jack Taylor, John Smith, father of young Jack Smith; and Elijah Taylor, who was going down to bring back Joe Pynn, George Allan was to accompany them.

The morning of Dec. 21 dawned calm and clear. It looked like a great day for the dogteams to make the two-hour trip to L'Anse aux Meadows and back.

Young Norm Taylor was a 21-year old Paul Bunyan of a man. He was tall in stature and as big and tough as they come, with hands like boxing gloves. Some folks would have described him as a strapping young man. Certainly Norm was without fear.

Early that morning, he was busy outside the house getting his dog team ready. His grandfather, John Taylor, spied Norm and asked, "Norm, where are you going?" Norm

'When he got as far as Sacred Bay, in the area of Duck Pond, the weather suddenly took a turn for the worst. Elijah quickly became disoriented in the wind and snow, and circled the pond three times before he sighted a trail marker.'

replied, "I'm going to L'Anse aux Meadows to bring father home – there's a party tonight – Gersh Bessey is married."

His grandfather warned, "B'y, there's weather coming." Elders in those days were very weather-conscious, and from experience they could predict when weather was in the making. But young Norm was determined and continued to harness the dogteam.

It was said that Norm had one of the best dogteams in the area, and having a good team was important in those days – dogteams were a means of survival and used extensively for transportation and domestic wood hauling. With a few well-chosen commands, a man's dogteam was as responsive as a new car is today. For instance, it was a common saying in those days to call out, "Look at the crow!" With this (and other commands) he would urge his dogs to go faster.

Seeing that Norm had his mind set on going, his grandfather warned, "B'y, you don't have much clothing on. Those serge pants won't keep you warm, and all you have is just a pair of kid gloves for your hands." (Norm's grandmother, Georgina, was a big woman and more than a match for young Norm when it came to determination, but she was crippled and confined to the house and had no idea he was heading to

L'Anse aux Meadows. She would have driven him back into the house had she known he was planning to make the trip).

John Smith set out that same morning to pick up young Jack at Bleak Point, but just before he made it to L'Anse aux Meadows, a blizzard struck and John veered off and headed for Noddy Bay to put up with kinkfolk there. That's where he remained until the storm blew over. John would have assumed that young Jack would stay with the sealing crew at L'Anse aux Meadows.

Meanwhile, young Elijah Taylor left that morning with a team of six dogs. His mission was to bring young Joe Pynn back to the wedding celebration in Raleigh that evening. When he got as far as Sacred Bay, in the area of Duck Pond, the weather suddenly took a turn for the worst. Elijah quickly became disoriented in the wind and snow, and circled the pond three times before he sighted a trail marker. Once he spotted the marker, he abandoned all hope of making it to L'Anse aux Meadows and followed the route towards Raleigh.

The snow was blowing so thick the dogs would have to stop to rub the snow and ice from their eyes. Elijah kept the treeline along the shore of Eastern Pond in sight. When he arrived safely at the community, he told Elijah Pynn how he had become lost – little

realizing the danger Norm and the other men would be in.

At L'Anse aux Meadows, Norm and the sealing crew readied for the trip back to Raleigh. Young Joe Pynn had decided to stay put in L'Anse aux Meadows, but after a little persuasion from Jack Sr. and George Allan, decided that he would return to Raleigh with the group. (Joe's seemingly unimportant decision to accompany the men would have a lasting impact on all concerned).

A short time after dinner, the group departed from L'Anse aux Meadows. Large flakes of snow swirled, and a northwest wind had sprung up. George Decker, an elder in the community, warned the boys it would be better to stay put rather than travel in these conditions, but young Norm would heed none of it.

The going was fairly good when they departed. At about the half-way point around Island Bay, the weather really turned nasty and worsened when they crossed the bottom of Island Bay and into the Lead and Eastern Pond. The wind was so strong it almost blew the men on their backs. Ice pellets and hailstones blew right into their eyes. It became a great struggle to make headway against the strong northwest wind and ice. Snow like pieces of glass slashed their faces. The wind was biting cold.

Norm, in his light serge pants and little kid gloves, began to shiver uncontrollably. The cold pierced through his light clothing and knifed through him with ferocious intensity, but Norm plowed through the storm, hanging onto the sled for support. His kid gloves were sheathed in ice.

The situation was going from bad to worse. Not only were the men struggling against the icy grip of the blizzard, but the wind blew the komatik and the team sideways and the dogs couldn't get any traction on the icy surface of the pond. Also, the dogs' eyes were filling with snow, and they stopped often to paw the snow from their faces. Norm had given up trying to direct the team – he let them make their own way – trusting them to find their way home.

None of the men were speaking – survival was their only concern.

It became very important to find shelter, especially for Norm, who was chilled through, but George Allan and John Smith decided to strike out on their own to look for

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'Along the way, they could see places where Jack and George Allan had stumbled into the water and crawled back out. Continuing farther along, the search party discovered that the missing men had made it all the way to Uncle Si's hay house at Eastern Brook Steady.'

A tragic Christmas

the trails leading to Raleigh. Joe walked a short distance to the marsh to check the conditions, but when he returned to the pond, there was no sign of anyone – Jack, Norm or the others. What was he to do?

Meanwhile, Jack had unhooked the team of dogs and left the komatik on the pond. He took Norm and led him and the dogteam up into the shelter of the trees. Norm had weakened fast and had become incoherent. He could no longer make any decisions beyond his desire to get warm and his teeth rattled uncontrollably. Young Jack gathered the dogs in a circle around their master in an effort to warm him up, then sat nearby and waited. He could do nothing more.

Joe was strong as a horse and wasn't a bit cold, though his face was all ballcattered up. The ice pellets were bad enough to cut the eyes right out of a man's head, but in spite of that, he headed for home. The

trek was about two km across open marsh, through the ridge trail, and out into the open expanse of the community.

It was only some 10 minutes or so before Joe would arrive home, and his poor mother, Susan, with her pinafore (called a 'pinny') wound around her arms, paced nervously around the house and said to her husband, Elijah, 'Joe is out in this.'

When Joe came through the door of his parents' house, supper was just finished and darkness had already set in. He told his father, Elijah, and his 15-year old brother, Theophilus, of the men's predicament and their need for immediate help.

In the Taylor household, Norm's mother, grandparents and siblings were unaware of the difficulties the men were in. Norm's younger brother, Harvey, seeing one of Norm's dogs showing up at the house, his harness hanging off, thought to himself, 'Well now, that's good enough; that dog is coming, the rest must be coming on, too'. He watched for the

komatik and the men, but there was no sign of them. He absently reached down and patted the dog's long silky hair, noting that the dog was warm enough, but his coat was completely covered with ice.

Joe's father, Elijah, younger brother Theophilus, along with Uncle Eb, made preparations for the trip into Eastern Pond to help the boys in trouble. As the word spread through the community, others prepared to search for the missing men.

It was two km from the community to Eastern Pond. The Pynn men headed out without a dogteam as the walking was good going on hard-packed snow and ice. The rescue party would have assumed that they would be able to use Norm's team to bring home the stranded men. They walked the trail across the marsh and down to the Pynn's wood share area. Upon arriving at the pond, Eb and Elijah searched the right side and Theo searched the left.

When Elijah sang out, Young Jack answered from the woods and came to meet them; he was still sensible and hadn't been too badly affected by the cold. He told them that Norm

was in rough shape, was suffering badly and was in need of immediate help. Elijah stayed with Norm and the dogs while Uncle Eb immediately returned to Raleigh and prepared a sled and dogteam. Theo took Young Jack and walked him all the way back to Raleigh, walking backwards the whole way, sheltering Jack from the ice pellets and wind. Halfway home, he met Uncle Eb heading back to Eastern Pond with the dogteam, and on the ridge above the community he was met by a larger search party heading into the same area.

As Theophilus neared his house, Jack collapsed, and said he could go no further. Theophilus set Jack down against a tree, and said, 'Don't you move from here. I'll be back.' He hurried home, and with his sister Lavinia's help, put Jack on the komatik and brought him to the house.

It didn't take long for Jack to recover, once he was inside the warm house and had a change of clothing.

Back at Eastern Pond, Uncle Eb found Elijah with Norm and the dogs. The dogs were still in a circle around Norm, and

wouldn't allow the men near him. Both Uncle Eb and Elijah had to beat the dogs off with sticks in order to load poor Norm onto the komatik. The dogs were left to make their own way home.

The trip back to Raleigh was a hasty one. Norm was brought into the house and laid on the floor by the woodstove.

His wet clothes were stripped off and warming pads were applied in an effort to revive him. His breathing was very shallow and he slipped in and out of consciousness. It was plain to see that Norm was in very bad shape. Though every effort was made to bring him back, Norm seemed to be in a far and distant place where he could not be reached. In this extreme condition it is even possible that Norm imagined he was still with his team, urging them towards home. His last words before he died seemed to be directed at his faithful team of dogs: "Look at the crow, you ****!"

Meanwhile, a massive search was on for Jack and George Allan, who had left the group on Eastern Pond. The search party picked up their trail as they followed Eastern Brook. Along the way, they could see places where Jack and George Allan had stumbled into the water and crawled back out. Continuing farther along, the search party discovered that the missing men had made it all the way to Uncle Si's hay house at Eastern Brook Steady. The two men had rested at Uncle Si's hay house for a spell, but in their confused state of mind, they struggled on. After leaving the hay house, Jack and George Allan made it a few hundred feet up the trail before collapsing against two large juniper trees, and that is where Jack Dawe and his search party found them.

The men were in bad shape. Their eyes were frozen shut with faces raw from the blowing ice. They were brought out to Raleigh to Al Patey's house. Granny Elliott, who tended to the men, would give little sips of brandy, rubbing some on their chests.

"Don't give them too much to drink," she said. "It could take their breath away."

Of the two, Jack Smith was by far the worst...as quickly as he was rubbed down and warmed up, he turned as cold as ice again. George Allan, on the other hand, wasn't nearly so bad – he could sit up and talk.

Within a week Jack and George Allan had recovered and were able to return to their homes.

Sixty-three years have passed since that fateful day of Dec. 21, 1943, and only a few of those who lived at the time of the tragedy remain to tell the story. Joe Pynn and his brother, Theophilus; Elijah Taylor; and Norm's brother, Harvey Taylor all live in Raleigh today. Norman Hedley Taylor is buried at Raleigh United Cemetery with an inscription on his headstone which is only partially visible. It reads: "Sleep on, dear son, thy work is o'er, thy willing hands will toil no more..."

(Leonard and Kathleen Tucker are residents of Ship Cove. They extend special thanks to Harvey Taylor of Back Cove, Raleigh, for suggesting that this incident be recorded.)

