

## GREAT NORTHERN PENINSULA



Canada



Newfoundland  
Labrador



# St. Carol's

*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.

# Hurricane Ione

WILLIS WHYATT, ST. CAROL'S

September 1955

*Hurricane Ione (pronounced eye-own) was the final of three hurricanes to hit the eastern seaboard in 1955. A tropical wave moved through Cape Verde on September 6, became a tropical depression on September 10, and a tropical storm later that day. Ione remained weak for the next 3 days, but steadily strengthened as it moved north of the Lesser Antilles, reaching hurricane strength on the 15th. Conditions were favourable for additional development, and Ione reached her peak of 120 mph winds on the 18th while north of the Bahamas. Dry and cooler air was gradually entrained in Ione's circulation, and the hurricane weakened to a minimal hurricane on September 19. The storm weakened to a tropical storm over land, but re-strengthened to a Category 2 hurricane over the northwestern Atlantic. Ione continued northeastward, and became extratropical on the 21st. The extratropical storm crossed over Newfoundland, and was last seen on September 24 over the North Atlantic. [www.storm-pulse.com/hurricane-ione-1955](http://www.storm-pulse.com/hurricane-ione-1955)*

## No roads, no lights, no phones

*St. Carol's is a fishing village on the east coast of the Great Northern Peninsula, just east of the town of St. Anthony. In 1955 there were no roads, no lights and no phones – so when Hurricane Ione passed alongside St. Carol's – the result was devastating.*

*Before the storm, more than*

*twenty families lived in the small fishing community; when it was all over, there were only eleven families that stayed. Willis Whyatt was thirteen years old at the time, but his recollection of Hurricane Ione and the damage she left behind is still a vivid memory.*

## The roof lifted off the house

At the time of the hurricane, I was down at the stage, washing out

At that time there were two families living in Grandfather's house, Uncle Clem Richards and Uncle Cyril Richards. It was a big, square, two-story house, and each family lived in half of the house.

So anyway, ten minutes after that, sure, more than half the roof was gone; it pitched right on top of the knap; a distance of a hundred feet or more. Grandfather had just come down off the knap moments before; he had some window sashes



Figure 1 The sea would have forced its way through the breakwater (which, in those days, was nearer the bottom of the cove) and tipped over all the wharves near the existing wharf on the far side.

salt bulk fish. My cousin Louis Johnson was my age, and he was looking out through the seams – through the spaces between the horizontal boards – of the stage, and cried, “Look! The roof just lifted on the house, and went back again!” And Grandfather said, “Yeah, I imagine now the roof lifted off of the house, boy.”

“Well,” he said, “I’m sure the roof lifted off the house.” That was about three o’clock in the afternoon.

painted and lodged up on the edge of the knap to dry, so he said he’d go up and get them now before they’d blow away. He had just got down to the stage when the roof peeled back and pitched right up where he had just been.

## I’m staying put!

The roof was gone off the house and the rain was just pelting out of the heavens. There was no gyproc in those old houses, only wallpaper

and hardwood with the beams. What's funny about the roof is that my step-grandfather, Cyril Richards – some of them old fellers are some contrary, boy – his wife, Aunt Mary, had a sister living up with Uncle Harry, so she went up to Uncle Harry's and was going to stay up there all night. So, when she got ready to go up there, she come down to get him to go up, and he said, "I'm not going up!" So he lied down on the couch with his rubber clothes on, with the rain and water pelting down on him; I remember walking in and seeing that. It was just stubbornness. He said, "It can storm as much as it likes, because I ain't leaving. You can blow the roof off her if you like, but I'm staying put."

### A living hurricane

So, we had this vicious storm from the northeast and the waves were rolling in. Suddenly, she hauled from the southwest; the wind pitched from the southwest – a living hurricane – churning all the water down in the cove.

Around nine or ten o'clock the sea started to roll in. I was about thirteen years old. The old man wouldn't allow me to go down the cove where all the men was; they were down there with the gas lanterns looking to see what was going on with the boats and stages. By and by the sea came in. I can see them now. Back then, there was fences and flakes, everything down in the cove, but when the men saw that wave, they all started to funnel up in over the fence, running hard. And the old man had a bad back, so he had a hard time getting over the fence.



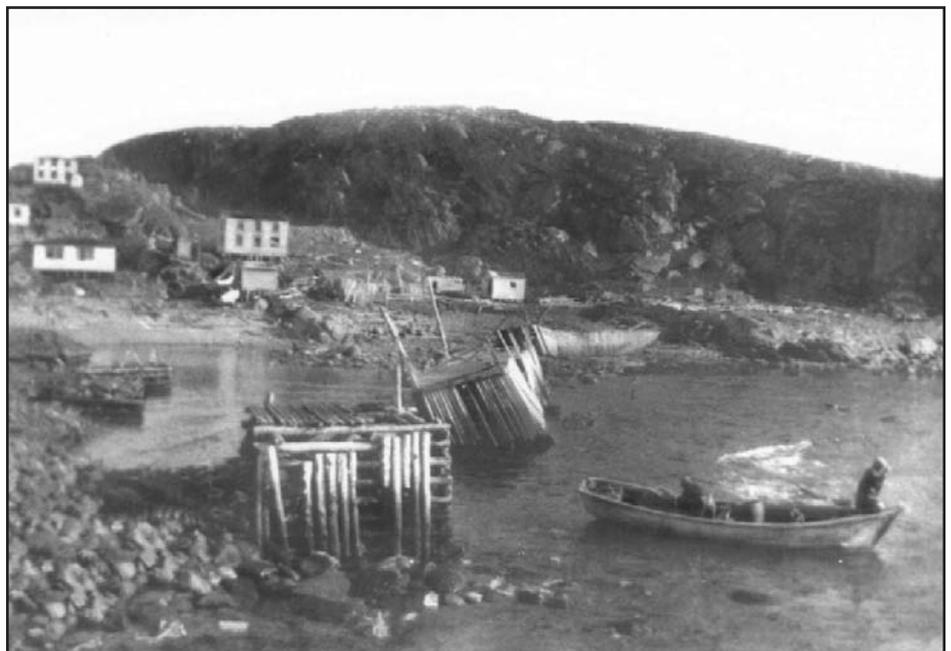
Figure 2 The sea would have come in through the two headlands (one is visible behind Elizabeth Whyatt) and surged into the cove, breaching the breakwater and demolishing the wharves along the shore.

The breakwater was out there – and, BANG! – the middle come right out of her – fifty to seventy feet – washed out! And in she come! She filled up! She filled up! By and by everything started to crack and groan and the inside stages in the beach was the first ones that went. They say when the wave hove up out there at the center of the wharf it was the height of

piled up on the beach. Some of the stages just fell in; just collapsed, flat. Most of it was nothing, only debris on the beach. There were seven wharves or stages, and after the storm there wasn't one left. One wave wiped them all out. Boy, I tell you, we had a salmon punt and, when the wave took it, it landed about two to three hundred feet from the water.

Round Hill.

Moments later, there wasn't one stage left, nothing, only rubble. There was one block of wharf and that was the very outside wall of Clem Richard's wharf; just one square block of wharf, that was the only thing left standing. There was nothing, only rubble; everything was



St. Carol's Breakwater after Hurricane Ione September 1955

## What now?

So, after the storm was over, I remember the old man and his two brothers, down the stage, in the store, wondering what their next move was. The wharves and the breakwater were gone. Everything was flat. What was the next move?

So, everybody decided they were going to leave; they were going to abandon the place. All the stages were gone...they'd never get another breakwater built...they were going to shift to St. Anthony...they were going to shift where they could still all fish together.

Then we was up to Uncle Cyril's, and well, he said, "I'm not going." He said, "Leaving St. Carol's, me and the old lady?" They was up in their sixties or seventies then.

Then Shirley's grandfather, well, his wife had been dead for years, and he said, "I'm not leaving, supposing I got to live here by myself."

Then Uncle Tom Rose, he said he wasn't leaving, so then there was three of them.

So, the old man said, "What am I going to do now? We can't leave them here by their selves, and I guarantee you, they're not going!" Then he said, "Well, to heck with it. Let's go and build it all up again." And they started again, just like that, the very next morning.

## Holes on skin pond

Just before the storm our stages at St. Carol's had been full of fish because a schooner was coming that week. You had to have good weather for schooners to come in and take the fish because there was always a lop or a swell on. So, we used to always take our dried fish,

carry it up and pack it up on the stage for when the schooner came.

We had all this salt bulk fish, plus we had so much dried fish down in the stage too, ready to ship on the schooner. Then the hurricane hit. Well, what a mess we had!

There was only two families in St. Carol's that had an oil stove at that time; they kept their winter supply in the stages. When the wave came in and smashed the wharves, the cans split open and oil seeped out on some of the fish. If there was oil on part of the fish, you couldn't sell any of it, so, that winter the dogs done good. There were

down. But in July a schooner come in the cove – fifty to sixty feet long, one mast into her and a load of stuff aboard. So me and Uncle Fred went out to see what she was up to, and the skipper said, "I got a load of wharf sticks here to build a breakwater for St. Carol's."

They unloaded the boat, towed all the wharf sticks in and sent a fellow here from Woodstock; a builder. He took a man from each fishing crew to help to build the breakwater, even though it was a busy time for fishing. The original breakwater had been in place long before Hurricane Ione, even before



Figure 3 A view of St. Carol's 2009

holes all over Skin Pond because people were watering the fish for their dogs.

## A schooner and a load of wharf sticks

The next summer, we was all fishing, we had some stages built by then and the breakwater was still a rough spot when the wind come

I was born. When we built the new breakwater, we decided to make it straighter so the sea would come in around it.

But nobody ever knew the government was sending help. It was a complete surprise.

**Glossary**  
**Dictionary of Newfoundland**  
**English**

1. Stage: an elevated platform on the shore with working tables, sheds, etc, where fish are landed and processed for salting and drying, and fishing gear and supplies are stored; FISHING STAGE.
2. Knap: a raised portion of land, often with a round top; crest of a hill; KNOB.
3. Pitched: To alight, land; to fall, as from a height.
4. Lodged: to place (an object) in a position; to set down on a surface.
5. Hove: To lift, bring, move, throw.
6. Shift: move
7. Lop: The rough surface of the sea caused by a stiff wind and marked by a quick succession of short breaking waves.

**Free Online Dictionary**

1. Breakwater: a massive wall built out into the sea to protect a shore or harbour from the force of waves.

## Giant Wave at the Haul-up Gulch

WILLIS WHYATT, ST. CAROL'S

*This is a story about nine men who walked across to the back of land behind St. Carol's to pull their sealing boats up a little higher because of a big sea. That place was called the haul-up gulch. All nine men were swept out to sea by a huge wave and two of them perished, Bill Johnson and Hayward*



Figure 1  
Elizabeth, Hayward and baby Willis

*Pilgrim. Willis Whyatt, who was five months old at the time, tells the story of his father, Hayward Pilgrim, who was twenty-two years old when he hauled up a sealing boat for the last time.*

*Prior to that fateful day of February 26, 1942, young Hayward Pilgrim was engaged to be married to Elizabeth Whyatt, only daughter of Charles Whyatt. Hayward had chosen a wedding ring for his bride-to-be, but Elizabeth was*

*never to wear it. It wasn't until many years later that the ring was given to Willis and Willis put it on his wife Shirley's finger. Shirley says the ring was never really blessed until their second daughter Brenda wore it at her wedding in St. Carol's many years after the tragedy.*

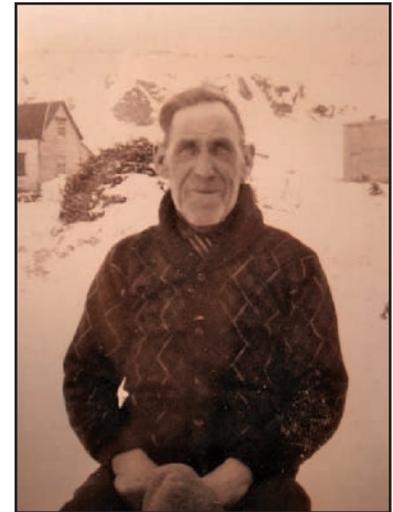


Figure 2  
Charles Whyatt,  
Elizabeth's father

*How nine men were swept out to sea while on land remains a mystery. On the hills overlooking the haul-up gulch, one has a bird's eye view of the broad expanse of the Atlantic stretching to the horizon, the jagged rocks crowding the shoreline behind the community of St. Carol's, and the gulch, a deep fissure in the hills which, at the time of the tragedy, would have been filled almost level with snow. One can only suppose that the giant wave must have struck the shoreline farther up, funneled up over the rocks with incredible force, and curled into an abrupt U-turn at the gulch, sweeping all nine men and the sealing boat off the land and into the sea.*



Figure 3 The sea came in over there...



Figure 4 And went out through there.

### A giant wave and a cruel sea

The men at the boats never knew what hit them.

In St. Carol's people used to come from everywhere to work the seal nets in winter, for one reason, St. Carol's is located on the eastern side of the northern peninsula right next to the Atlantic Ocean and was a good place for seals. The ocean would freeze up and the westerly wind would push the slob off the land.

In St. Carol's they had what was called a haul-up gulch; men worked their seal nets out at the back of the land and hauled up their seal boats at the gulch. When a big sea threatened on February 26, 1942, it was all hands down to the gulch to haul up the boats. "So they went to haul up their seal boats and there come Mr. Sea. The next thing they knew, the sea drained out and my father was swept away."

Willis Whyatt reflects, "They couldn't understand it – the sea never come in through the gulch, the sea come out through. The men who survived said it looked as if the sea must have gone in, burst inside the snow and the cliffs, and burst out. They just couldn't figure out

what happened."

In the blink of an eye, "My father, Hayward Pilgrim, grabbed a rock when the sea started to go out through," says Willis. But Mr. Pilgrim was up against a cold, churning sea, a lot of snow, and slob ice. When Fred Richards Sr. swept by, Hayward grabbed him by the leg and they held fast to a rock, but before the two men could draw breath, another wave struck them, tearing them off the rock and carrying them further out. Fred Richards, completely at the mercy of a cruel sea, came up hard against another rock, but young Hayward Pilgrim



Figure 5 Hayward Pilgrim's Bible

was left with nothing to grasp on to.

Willis says, "They said that the sealing boat, the one they were

hauling up – went over the bellicatter, then went down under, and when she come up, they said there wasn't a piece of her big enough to see, nothing only splinters – she was washed right out."

When it was over, all that remained on the surface of the waves was slob ice, bellicatters, and snow. "So," says Willis, "you can imagine what happened to the two men that drowned; I don't guess they suffered very much when they went over the bellicatter." The two men, Billy Johnson and Hayward Pilgrim, were never seen again. "There was no way in the world to find them, because there was nothing left to find," says Willis.

### A Bible

The Bible (left) was given to Willis by his grandmother, Mrs. Richard Pilgrim, but it belonged first to Hayward Pilgrim. When Mr. and Mrs. Richard Pilgrim moved to Main Brook to live, she gave Willis his father's Bible.

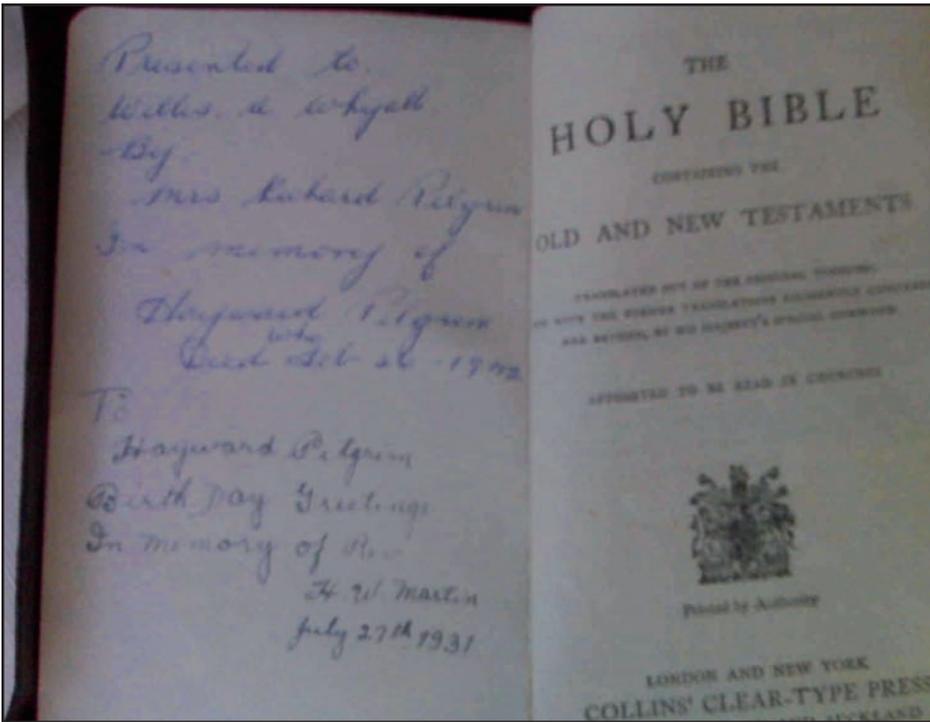


Figure 6  
 Inscription on fly leaf: "Presented to Willis A. Whyatt by Mrs. Richard Pilgrim in memory of Hayward Pilgrim who died Feb. 26, 1942." And, underneath: "To Hayward Pilgrim, Birth Day Greetings, In memory of Rev. H.W. Martin, July 27th 1931."

**Nine men**

Those who were swept out to see were: Fred Richards Sr. (Uncle Abe's Fred, Shirley's father), Fred Richards Jr. (Uncle Cyril's Fred), Albert Pilgrim, Ray Simms, Cyril Richards, George Kinsella, Alf Mugford, Bill Johnson (deceased) and Hayward Pilgrim (deceased).

**Out around brook**

Willis and Shirley Whyatt have lived in St. Carol's all their lives. Willis can remember his grandmother scrubbing overalls at a place called 'out around brook', east of the community towards the coastline and the walking trail. The brook flows down over a rocky hill

and the water is clear and clean and cold. He recalls bringing the mats to his grandmother, who'd lay them on flat stones and scrub them with a homemade cake of soap and a stiff brush while the icy water carried the soap suds to the sea.



Figure 7 Fred Richards Jr. (Uncle Cyril's Fred)



Figure 8 Elizabeth Whyatt 2009

**Glossary**  
**Dictionary of**  
**Newfoundland English**

1. Slob ice: heavy, slushy, densely packed mass of ice fragments, snow and freezing water, especially on the surface of the sea.
2. Bellicatters: ice formed by the action in winter of spray and waves along the shore-line, making a fringe or band on the landward side.



Figure 9 Shirley and Willis Whyatt