



Canada

Newfoundland  
Labrador

# St. Lunaire-Griquet

*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.

# St. Lunaire: Old Days, Hard Times

HARVEY & LIZZIE COMPTON



Figure 1 Harvey Compton

## Shack town

I was born March 12, 1934 in a cabin along the shoreline at the bottom of Pistolet Bay in a place known as Shack Town. Those were called the 'Dirty Thirties'. People moved to Shack Town, I would say, because of lack of clothing and shelter to live out on the coast in the winter. They were also cutting railway ties. A lot of people were on the dole at that time. With the dole, men could work – it was almost like a barter system – they would do so much work and exchange it for food and clothing. After it was called the dole, it was called Relief, then Welfare and then Social Security.

In summer, we'd come back to St. Lunaire on the coast to fish (at that time it was called St. Leonard's and pronounced 'Slenners').

My father, Mark Compton, married twice. His first wife was Agnes

Burden. They had two children but she died in childbirth and the baby died with her. Then my father married Evangeline Pilgrim from St. Anthony Bight. They had six children but one died. I was the oldest boy in the second family.

## An Omen?

One summer morning I saw a partridge on the window. My younger brother Freeman, who was eighteen months old, was sick with whooping cough; he had been sick for weeks and weeks. Father went fishing in the morning, and I was still in bed. I remember looking at the window and I saw a partridge, so I called out to Mom to come in, and she said what do you want? And I said I saw a partridge on the window, and she asked me what colour it was. I said white and she said a partridge isn't white – you didn't see anything. But I knew what I saw. That was in the morning and before dinner my younger brother was dead.

## Gone fishing

When I was nine years old, I started fishing with my father. I rowed with one paddle because I wasn't big enough to use two. I suppose if you put it all together I fished twenty years or so, which I did with a hook and line.

## School

I quit school while I was in grade nine. Actually, I finished grade nine, and I did very well in school, really well. In June, I would have had to write the Provincial exams. If I told you why I quit, you proba-

bly wouldn't believe it – but people used to have to pay two dollars to write the Provincial exams – and my father didn't have two dollars to give me. That was a year before Confederation and I was fourteen. I suppose because of his pride, my father wouldn't ask anybody for a loan.

We had a good grade nine teacher that year, Ern Anthony from Seldom. There was another teacher, John Acreman, he was the teacher I most admired when I was in grade five. I finished two grades in one year, grades five and six. You couldn't give me anything in English, in them grades that I couldn't do. You know, Mr. Acreman came to see me after I was married, and the first thing he said to me was, "I often wondered what happened to you, because," he said, "I never ever seen anybody that could master grammar like you could."

## Meeting Lizzie

I met Lizzie when she was fifteen years old and I was nineteen. She lived in Joe's Cove and I lived in Sleepy Cove. Joe's Cove was the first cove coming into town: there was Joe's Cove, Sleepy Cove, and Garden Cove. You walked to Joe's Cove, Sleepy Cove, and Garden Cove, but they weren't connected – only by footpath. People were sparsely scattered because you lived close to the water because that's where your wharves and stages were.

I didn't know Lizzie as a youngster because she was born in Port Hope Simpson, Labrador. Her father and her grandfather worked in the woods. When Lizzie's father died, Lizzie came to Joe's Cove to

live with her grandmother. Her parents were Steven and Annie Hann, and she was born August 18, 1939. So, Lizzie and I knocked around together for a couple of years and were married October 14, 1954.

### The wedding and reception

I got a loan of twenty dollars to get married: five dollars for the ring, which I ordered from Eaton's, five dollars for the wedding dress – her aunt, Lavinia Earle, made the wedding dress – five dollars for the minister, and five dollars to live on.

We walked to the church and got married, then had the reception in my father's house. The church we were married in was located where the Fishermen's Center is now. For our reception we had homemade fresh meat and turr soup, with sandwiches. Everybody brought something; it was an open invitation to the whole community to attend. I think May Earle made the wedding



Figure 2 Lizzie still has her wedding dress

cake.

At the reception, there wasn't a lot of room, so you'd set the table out. Everybody would sit, whoever could sit in. Then the bride's girls and the bride's boys (we used to call them that then) washed the dishes. And then the next people would sit in, and then they'd wash the dishes and more people would sit in.

We even had people there from Bonavista because there was a boat in here buying fish at the time.

After the wedding, we moved in with my parents because we had no house – and very little of anything else. I had fished that summer, and then I went to work for a merchant. When we got married I was working, and at that time you didn't get paid until the end of the year. If you worked five months, you got paid the last day of work. It was more or less a credit system.

All Lizzie brought with her was a small suitcase, and a homemade quilt her grandmother gave her.

Lizzie says, "All that was in that suitcase was just the bit of clothes I had."

Lizzie started off with no modern facilities at all. There was no plumbing and she had just a washboard and a galvanized wash tub to do laundry. The clothes were hung mostly on clothes lines, but there were some clothes poles, too. Clothes poles were good for hanging sheets and blankets. You'd drape the blanket or sheet over the pole, then pin it underneath. Clothes poles were strung through long underwear and bloomers and shirt sleeves and pant legs, as well.

### Their Own Home

We were married in 1954 and

moved into our own house at



Figure 3 the Compton's Home in Sleepy Cove (Doug Earle's House in behind)

Sleepy Cove three years later. To get lumber to build the house, I went in on dog team and cut the wood around Stock Pond and hauled it to the mill at Bartlett's Brook and had it sawed there. Then I brought it home on dog team and built my house. I worked like a dog.

When I completed it, it was an old-fashioned two storey house. That style of house was the standard back then.

### Fisheries Officer



Figure 4 Harvey Compton's cap badge, name tag, and official badge



I started as a Federal Fisheries Officer in May 1975 and retired July 1995. I worked in what was called the Newfoundland Region first, which was from Harbour Deep to Cook's Harbour. Then they split it into the Gulf Region because the Newfoundland Region ended at Cape Bauld. So then I took the Gulf Region and worked from Cape Bauld to Big Brook. I also worked in the Brig Bay area, the Port-aux-Basques area, and I did a lot of the offshore, too.

I don't think being a fisheries officer was a dangerous job. As a fisheries officer, you were dealing with people. There was no criminals in the fishery: there was people that poached, and people that did things outside of what they were allowed, but they weren't criminals. They were just trying to get away with it. If a man had a family at home, or even if he didn't, he was just trying to get away with it. If a man was allowed to catch twelve trout and he caught thirteen, and I said, "You have to give me that trout," and he said, "You're not going to get it," I wasn't going to put up a fuss to get them: let him take the trout. I could also charge the person, but I wasn't going to pull out a gun and say, "Now, boy, pass over that trout."

I think the only time a fisheries officer should have a gun is for the offshore. We've had some of our fisheries officers – the boat went on with them onboard, and the fisheries officer had to fire across the bow.

What is there in the Fishery that you would shoot a fellow for? And why should you intimidate people with a weapon?

## **An Old-fashioned stake-out**

I remember one incidence of poaching. The river we were staking out was a poacher's paradise; Parker's River over in Pistolet Bay, what we call Western Brook. There were two of us from Fisheries and there were some guys from the States, and we were watching them. One guy was fishing and his wife was taking pictures with a big movie camera. The guide they had was from Newfoundland, and they were fishing during a closed time – not a closed season – a closed time.

I said to the other Fisheries officer, "Now, you go for the guy that's fishing, and I'll go for the camera." I knew we'd have good evidence with the pictures.

We caught them and I took the film out of the camera, but it never went to court because he posted a six hundred dollar bond and went out of the country and didn't come back, and we didn't have to use anything as evidence, so I sent back her film.

## **Forfeited rod**

Once, a man wrote me a letter and told me his rod was of sentimental value, and wondered if he could get it back. We had forfeited the rod under the Order of Forfeiture. So I got his rod back for him. You know, he came back here one day and knocked on our door – just as I was finished with the fishery – and come in and told me how he appreciated what I did.

Mr. Compton shakes his head, remembering, and says, "You don't do bad stuff to people."

## **Harvey Compton tells a story**

There was a man and his wife, Thomas and Dora Burden. Now, this Thomas Burden, my father was married to his sister (his first wife, but she wasn't my mother). Her brother came down and I think he went to Ship Cove. I think he was a share man over there with somebody. And he came over in the fall of the year and when he came over he got the loan of Uncle Tom's punt. Uncle Tom said, "Now, you got to get that boat back; I wants it back!"

Now, the fellow said, "I'll get your boat back to you, dead or alive, she'll come back to you." And he rowed across the bay to Butler's Point, which was about a mile and a half away. Once he got ashore on the other side of the bay, he pulled it up on the beach and walked to St. Carols.

One morning, a while after the fellow borrowed his punt, Uncle Tom got up and he looked out and saw a boat coming across the bay. And by and by he said, "Dora, I believe that's my boat coming over there, and nobody aboard of her."

And she said, "Watch until it gets closer."

When she got over to the island, he could see the punt – because Uncle Tom had good eyes – and he said, "Yes, that's my boat." So, he walked down in the cove – down at Sleepy Cove – on the wharf, and he watched the boat coming in. She was coming right in, head-on, right for the wharf. And there was two wharves – I'll tell you how close they were together: when we were boys, you'd run as fast as you could, and we could jump across. And that boat came in the cove –

come right straight in the cove – no paddles out or nothing, and came right in to where he used to have her tied on. And he got down aboard the boat and he tied her on.

That was in November 1941, and in February the following year the man who had borrowed Uncle Tom's punt was washed out to sea and never seen again.

Nobody thought anything of the boat coming back to Uncle Tom because, they said, the boat must have driven across the bay. After that man died, then everybody had something to say about it.



Figure 1 A photograph of Hector Earle building one of the many boats he built



Figure 5 Lizzie and Harvey Compton at home

## Boat Building

JEAN & HECTOR EARLE

**Hector Earle**  
**Boat Builder and Carpenter**

**Working with machinery and carpentry – a way of life**

Hector Earle of St. Lunaire-Griquet, built a boat from stem to stern in his workshop at Goose Bay, Labrador, and he has built many other boats besides. Mr. Earle, a native of St. Lunaire, moved to Goose

Bay in the 1970s and was employed at a wood's operation company called Liner Board as a heavy equipment operator. Within a year of learning how to operate heavy equipment, Mr. Earle was an instructor, teaching a class of fifteen to operate the same kind of machinery.

Liner Board, one of Joey's big projects, was government funded. They built a mill in Stephenville and shipped pulpwood from Labrador. When the PCs came into power they took it over, but after four or five years with very little to show for their money, they closed it down. When Liner Board closed its doors, Mr. Earle went into general construction with the provincial government, building houses for



Figure 2 The finished product

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, where he was employed as a carpenter and handyman. It was full-time work: five days a week, twelve months a year.

"Anytime I wasn't working, I





Figure 3 Hector and Jean Earle at their home in St. Lunaire

spent building my boats. Most evenings and weekends I was working on a boat in the workshop or working on something at the cabin.” His wife, Jean, says he built a beautiful set of stairs in their cabin at Tarrington Basin.

As a child in St. Lunaire, Hector spent most of his time watching the older men, including his father, making their own boats. “I’d watch them from start to finish. I was always interested in boat-building,” he says, “even when I was in school.” He helped his dad build boats and helped others too, and when he was seventeen, he went into the woods, cut his own timber, and built his own boat. “I had no teacher; what I learned, I learned down around the stages.”

Hector Earle was born at Sleepy Cove, St. Lunaire, November 28, 1936. His paternal grandfather, Joe Earle, came from Twillingate and married a woman by the name of Hussey from Clarke’s Beach. Their son, Hemon, was born at St. Lunaire and married Edith Tucker of

Quirpon.

Mrs. Jean Earle, who videotaped her husband building the boat, says, “He has a talent for carpentry as well as boat-building. It comes from both sides of his family; his mother’s side especially. They were great finished carpenters; nothing they did was rough; it was always well done – moldings

and facings and things like that. It’s a born talent.”

“When it comes to wood, I’m not afraid to try,” laughs Hector.

## Griquet

RALPH PILGRIM

*Ralph Pilgrim, a native of St. Lunaire-Griquet, has had his share of setbacks in life, but he is a hardy man who has made his own boats, his own houses, his own wharves, raised a large family, and made a living by the work of his hands and the sweat of his brow. He has a deep and abiding faith in God and likes to tell stories to illustrate God’s provision in times of need. He lives with his wife Roslyn in Griquet.*

### Family tree

*Ralph Pilgrim’s mother, Sarah Ann, was the daughter of Frederick and Sarah Ann Pynn. Mr. Pilgrim’s father was Thomas (Tom) Pilgrim*



Figure 1  
Mr. Pilgrim has always lived by the water and is always working at something

and his grandfather was James Pilgrim, who married Jessie Adams. His great grandfather was John, who came from Carbonear and was the first Pilgrim in Griquet. Ralph married Beatrice Patey and they had fifteen children, but one died in infancy. Years later, when Beatrice died, Mr. Pilgrim married Hazel Norman, who was from Pacquet, and when she died a few years ago, Mr. Pilgrim married Roslyn, daughter of Harry Cull from St. Anthony Bight, and Ralph and Roslyn celebrated their first wedding anniversary on Mr. Pilgrim's 86th birthday.

Mr. Pilgrim's mother, Sarah Ann, was a Salvation Army soldier and a midwife. He recalls that his mother got into midwifery pretty early, when he was ten or twelve years old. "I can remember the first time she borned a baby: a fellow down the road, he come up, and me and my brother Am were asleep downstairs. My mother was called Ann, and this fellow sang out to Ann, but Am thought the fellow was singing out to he!"

### Family life

As a boy I was taken to church by my mother, and I always went to Sunday School; no going down around the pond for me. The other boys were down on the pond, or over fishing for trout, but my mother was the boss when it come to making us do things like going to church and stuff like that. My father would never say anything; he was the quietest man that ever lived. I had three sisters and three brothers: Gladys, Winnie and Minnie, and Ambrose, James and Leonard.

When I was eighteen I was a



Figure 2 Rebuilding wharf and stage in Griquet

man, I could do anything at all; I could turn my hand to anything, nearly any kind of carpenter work; I just learned it on my own. I built my own trap skiff, and a few years ago I built my own wharf. I built my own speedboats; cut and sawed the wood for my boats, and cut and sawed the wood for this house and built it, too.

*Mr. Pilgrim used to live on the point, along with other members of his family, but there were some years when storms came and the seas were a little too close for comfort, so, when winter came, they put their houses on logs and sticks and moved them across the snow and further inland. Just a few years ago there was another memorable storm.*

"The winter before last we had a big storm; the harbour was full of ice. The seals washed ashore and were killed, the ice come in through the gap and come in on the harbour. There was a place we used to swim,

a hole about ten feet deep, full of saltwater. It was there all my life time; that's where we used to swim, and when that big storm came that hole filled with sand, and that never ever happened before."

### Ralph relates some stories from his past

*Mr. Pilgrim has a rich repertoire of stories he likes to tell and many of them reflect God's care and provision in times of need.*

### A white and black cat

A young girl was staying at her grandmother's house, and the grandmother had a white cat. One night they put the cat outdoors and barred the door and went to bed. The next morning they got up—the cat used to sleep on the foot of the bed all the time when she was in the house—and there was a black cat on the foot of the bed. It scared the



young girl; she didn't know what to think of that: a black cat on the foot of the bed!

Well, it turns out they burned oil in the oil stove – and they figured out that the cat got up on the roof of the house and come down the chimney and come out through the stove. When she came out, she was covered in soot. They tracked the cat from the stove to the foot of the bed.

And, oh! What a mess!

### **Broken blades, lost and found**

Down through the years, scatter mysterious things have happened to me. One time I went moose hunting, me and my son and another fellow.

I had a license for Ten Mile Pond. Now, Ten Mile Pond is a nice stretch of water over towards Rod-dickton. It can be rough there, too when you get a westerly wind, my son, I tell you. We went down the pond, and oh, my, water was spraying up on both sides of the boat. I'd

say it was a fifty mile wind; a fifty mile breeze and everything was feather-white.

I was never down there before to the pond. When we got down in the narrows, you could see bottom. I didn't know if there was a shoal there or what, so I slowed down the motor; we had 35hp. We had our tent and everything aboard for the night, and when I slowed her down, she stopped, and when she stopped, I heard the blades drop off.

I started the motor again and she spun over, and when I turned the motor over, the blades were gone.

Well, boy, if it hadn't been blowing I would have got out and went down. There was a couple fathom of water there; I could have went down and got them. Well, it was blowing a gale of wind, and there we was, boy, so we got out the paddles and got to shore.

We was there for awhile, considering what to do, and I said, "Allan, my son, you take the rifle now, and walk down around that bottom, and me and Wins Pilgrim, we'll cross

the bottom, and we'll pick you up over there."

Going across, there were big lops. And you know about a speed-boat, you turn her stern to the wind – stern on – and it's like a sail – she'll go to windward stern on. So, we turned her around and got her stern on to the wind, and began to paddle. Somehow we got across. One place there, we had to go across a bar, so we picked away the rocks and got across, but we couldn't get out around the point; it was blowing too hard. Oh, my son, what a lop! And we went on across and we got over there.

So, we waited for Allan. By and by we seen him coming, with a rifle slung over his shoulder and his two hands behind him. I didn't know what that was all about, but when we got up alongside him, he said, "Guess what I picked up?"

Wins said, "A set of blades, I suppose!" Because he knew we had no blades; he only said it for badness.

And Allan said, "Yes, a set of blades!"

Now, where did the blades come from down on Ten Mile Pond? We was never down there before, and it looked pretty much like there wasn't much down there; all woods and everything like that. Sure enough, he had a set of blades. He found them in an old wreck that was down there. They was broke up a little bit – buckled up – but I got the axe and put the blades on the rock and beat them out and put them on. I never had n'er sheer pin; I got a nail and put it through. They were the same kind of blades as the ones I lost, so I put them on and away we went. And, as far as I know, I got them blades now; yes



Figure 3 Mr. Pilgrim hunts seals and moose



sir, I kept them!

Boy, it seemed mysterious to me, but a lot of things like that have happened to me.

### **Nuddy bag but no matches**

I was over across St. Lunaire Bay one time when I had my family. We used to go over there in the fall of the year to pick partridgeberries to make jam for the winter. We picked the berries and, come dinnertime, we boiled the kettle, and I got the wood; perhaps some cronnicks was there on the marsh, and I built up the fire. There was a little splash of water, so I said, "I'll get some water there in that place." I got the water, put the wood on, and got the kettle on. And from the nuddy bag I got some brown paper and put it under for to light it.

I thought the wife had the matches. I looked in the nuddy bag and there was none there, and I said, well she's got them. I sung out to her and asked if she had any matches and she said, "In the nuddy

bag!"

I said, "No, they're not. There's none in the lunch bag!"

"Well," she said, "They're supposed to be there."

And I said, "There are none there. I guess there'll be no tea for dinner."

I stood up and looked over across the flash and I seen something red. I never looked for nothing in particular, I just looked. I thought it might be an empty shell from a cartridge, so I walked over and picked it up, and it was one of them Bic cigarette lighters. I held it up to the sun and he was half full of fuel.

And I struck it brother, and it lit, just as quick as a wink.

### **Molasses bread and a can of beans**

I used to go over across on the other side of Pistolet Bay in the woods. A year or two before that, there had been a fire and there was a lot of dry wood around Mary Brown's Cove.

I got up in the morning and I said to my wife, what you got to go in my nuddy bag? She said, not a thing; only some molasses bread. I said, no fish? Well, I said, put in what you got and I'll go on.

When I got in to Raleigh Road, I runned over a tin can; it was a shiny can. I backed up the truck and I wondered what could be in that can; funny for a can to be there like that on the road. I shook it and said, that's a can of beans. Well, it come to my mind right away that I never had nothing to go in my nuddy bag, and look, I was going in the woods and now I had a can of beans.

So I took them aboard and away I went. Some other fellows was there, cutting wood, and we had our dinner and I shared the can of beans with them. I don't know who lost it or how it come to be there, but when I opened it up and heated it, boy, they was good beans, best as ever I eat.

### **Right when we needed It**

Me and Len used to work together cutting logs. One day we loaded up my truck and we was on our way out when we lost the oil in our truck. The oil light come on, then we went on a little further and she started to knock. Boy, I pulled over and stopped, waited awhile, then we went on a little farther, and well, we had to stop again.

We got out of the truck and waited to see if someone would come along. Then Len looked over and said, what's that over there? He walked over and looked down and said, boy, that's lube, and this was a can of oil. So we opened the can, put it in, and went on. There were four or five tins, so we put them in



Figure 4 Mr. Pilgrim remembers the old days

the truck and come on home. Dave Snow had been out that way; we figured he lost it. Sometime after, I was talking to Dave and he said, yes, he had opened a case to give a fellow a can, and had forgotten to take it with him.

### **God's hand to our mouth**

There was a fellow in Goose Bay, a pretty well-off fellow, too. He and his wife – they were beautiful people – they had a big truck and a car too. She gave us the truck to use while we was down there.

The husband said, how do you look after a family that size with all those mouths to feed? The way it was, I said, we can get a bit from hand to mouth, but it's from God's hand to our mouth, and I said that made all the difference. And he agreed.

### **Glossary**

#### **Dictionary of Newfoundland English**

1. Scatter: widely separated
2. Lops: the rough surface of the sea, caused by a stiff wind and

marked by a quick succession of short, breaking waves.

3. Blades: propeller blades
4. Nuddy Bag: a knapsack used to carry food and personal equipment
5. Cronnicks: tree or root killed or much weathered by wind, water or fire; piece of such wood gathered as fuel; small twisted fir or spruce.
6. Flash: a small pond in a marshy area