



Wild Bight

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.

Wild Bight

HENRY & HAZEL BROWN



Figure 1 Hazel & Henry Brown in their garden at Wild Bight

Henry Brown

My great grandmother was a proper Indian; I'm not exactly sure of her name, but all I ever heard was her name was Sally Brown; it might have been Sarah. Sally married my great grandfather, Joey Brown. They might have come from St. John's because my father was reared up in St. John's. My father moved to St. John's after he was married, then they moved back here to Wild Bight. My grandfather was Albert Brown and he married Martha Larkin. My father was Samuel, and he married Leah Elliott from Cook's Harbour. I was born April 22, 1938, and I was two years old when my mother died; my grandmother reared me up. My father had six of us, so he had it tough. The oldest was only ten and I was two when my mother died, but my father held our family together.

Hazel Woodward

I was born June 4, 1946. I lived with my grandmother in Boat Harbour because I was one of a twin. Mom was sick after I was born so my grandmother took me and reared me up, and my sister, Winnie stayed with my mom. Mom had ten children altogether; me and Winnie was the first, and my mother had another set of twins, a boy and a girl. My grandmother brought up thirteen of her own, and she reared up three more besides.

I can remember, living at Grandmother's, putting the flat iron on the stove – what we used to iron the clothes with – and, in the night, we'd go up and we'd run the iron over the sheets to make it warm before we'd get in the bed. Everything was ironed back then because clothes were made of cotton; we used to iron towels, face cloths, and diapers.

Living at Wild Bight

Hazel and I raised six children. There was Cyril, who was raised by Grandmother Woodward in Boat Harbour, and then there was Cora, Clyde, Colette, Carrie, Clifford, and Claude.

In Wild Bight there was a school, which, at one time, was attended by as many as thirty-six students. There used to be up to twenty families here; now it's down to nine, and some households only have one person living in them. Most families left when the fishery went down.

We got electricity in the late 1960s or early 1970s. We never had water, and we used a wood stove. We used a gas lantern in the kitchen, and there was only one stove in the house, and it was in the kitchen. We had a small lamp to take to the rooms. We'd get up and light the fire in the morning and get the kids off to school. We didn't



Figure 2 Gardening was, and still is, a way of life

have dogs after we were married; we had one of the old-fashioned Bombardier snowmobiles, and in the early 1960s there were ski-doo.

Everybody had their own gardens and root cellars, too, but there are only a few root cellars now. We still grow cabbages, beets, turnip and potatoes. Our root cellar is under our store, so that's where we keep our vegetables.

People used to have a bull, and cows for milk, butter and meat, and a few people had sheep. Lots of times there wasn't enough grass for the cows, so we used to make hay, and wherever you cut it to, you'd put it up in pooks. To make a pook you'd get three or four sticks and put them up like a teepee, or A-frame, then put the hay over to let the air and the sunlight in. Just before winter, we'd bring the hay home by dog team and, later, with a ski-doo.

We never had much trouble with the bulls we had, but I remember when old Mr. Campbell lived on the Cape, he used to have one, and if you heard that bull coming, you'd see all we young fellers going for sure! Oh, yeah, Mr. Campbell's bull had a big ring in his nose. Sometimes the bulls used to get into it with each other; we didn't mind that a bit to watch the bulls fighting. Sometimes, three or four of us young fellows, we'd get the rocks and wait for them, and when they come, we'd belt the rocks into them and make the run. I suppose now, you wouldn't be allowed to let the bulls run free.

Do you know Hewlett Larkin? I thought everyone in the world knew Hewlett. He lives in St. Anthony; he has one of them apartments over there; he lives by

himself. He was always at something wrong, wouldn't you know. So, one time we had the minister here, from the States, and Hewlett had a bull at that time. And the bull was surly; and he'd come out on the point, and Hewlett would talk to the bull same as he'd talk to me or to you. Only he was ripping the big oats out of the bull. "I'll let you know whose boss down on the point!" The minister was down the road and he could hear it all, and every now and then he'd look at me and shake his head.

Back in those days, animals in Wild Bight were not confined; they were let loose and sometimes they'd wander as far as Boat Harbour; we'd have to walk out and find them and drive them back. Wintertime Uncle Tom used to keep them at Stag Lead. Stag Lead was about sixteen kilometers from here.

Stag Lead used to be a winter place for people in Wild Bight. Up here, I think there are four or five leads.

Martha Brown, Midwife, and a Saucy Bull

My grandmother, Martha Brown, was a midwife. One day she was walking to Boat Harbour, a distance of six miles, and they had a saucy bull up there. And the bull came after her, and she ran and climbed up the telegraph pole and hooked her umbrella around the wire and stayed there until the bull was gone. It was only a twelve-volt battery they were using on the telegraph poles at that time, and the poles they used then wasn't so big as they are now, probably twenty feet high. Grandmother Brown wasn't very tall, either.

Aunt Martha borned everybody in the Bight who is my age and older. And she borned babies in Cook's Harbour and Boat Harbour. Aunt Jeannie Laing was a midwife, too, and Aunt Blanche Woodward used to be with her. Violet Fields in the harbour used to do it, too, after they got up. But first it was Grandmother Brown. She'd be everywhere; I suppose she even went as far as Flowers Cove. They'd come down on dogs and come get her.

Closing Big Brook

In Wild Bight, in winter, it's better if the snowplow doesn't touch the roads because the minute they put down a row of snow – a windrow, they call it – the snow levels off. Big Brook was the same way. They closed Big Brook road and moved them out of it because there was too much snow to clear on the roads wintertime. In three years they haven't bulled the road, and you can almost go to Big Brook anytime the winter, except maybe March month.

Fishing

My family were fishermen; that's all there was to do here. I started fishing here with a trap crew in Wild Bight, but the fish started to go. The draggers came in and cleaned up all the fish out in the Strait of Belle Isle. Every spring, as soon as the ice moved off, the draggers would show up and you could look out at night and it was just like a city with all those lights. Back and forth, back and forth, dragging the fish off the bottom before the fish could get in to the inshore fishery. We couldn't get out there, it was too



Figure 3 A view from the Brown's back yard

far and we didn't have a big enough boat; we had to wait for the fish to come in where we had our trap berths. It was in the 1960s and 1970s when the fishery started to decline. That was the foreigners that was coming in then. Then the government said no boat 65 foot or longer was allowed in to the land. But they allowed a boat 64 foot 11

inches long to come right in to the beach – and they cleaned out the works. The government finally drove the foreigners off, with a twelve-mile limit, but these boats under 65 feet come right in. First, they started off with gillnets, fifty gillnets in a string – about five miles long.

I worked at fishing till the Mora-

torium in 1992; In 1980 I went fishing in Labrador; that's when it started to fall back. I fished there for twelve years. We'd fish locally in June, and we'd go down in July to Bateau, Labrador, where the fish were just coming on because, in Labrador, August was always the best time for trapping. We'd ship our gear ahead on a CN boat, and we had our own wharf there, and our own place to stay. We could buy our grub at Black Tickle, and that's where we sold our fish. And then we'd go up to Punch Bowl; it's shaped just like the bowl. But it's a shame, the wharves and stages were built for the fishery at that time, but the fishery didn't last. And the fishermen that was going there, they had their own little shacks, they had them almost built right around. I think the lot of them called it Aspenite City; aspenite is what people now call particle board.

A close call

I went to Belle Isle one summer, too – I think it was the summer of 1978. Me and Erastus Larkin and another feller went out for a spell jigging and we took a salmon net. The fish was so thick; we couldn't even get our cod trap carried out. And I tell you, we were salting it at Paddy' Miller's stage on the northeast end of Belle Isle at Black Joe. And we had to hoist our fish twenty-eight feet up; the stages were right up on the cliff. The light keepers would help us if they wanted to get a few quintals of fish; they ended up with 78. We caught 315 quintals. We salted it (salt bulk), and Edmund Taylor brought it in for us in his long liner; he did it in one trip. He took our 315 quin-



Figure 4 Fishing gear at Wild Bight

tals, the lighthouse keeper's 78 quintals and packed it over the hatch, and boy, it was some rough time because the wind was westerly and boat was overloaded. There were three or four drums of fuel put down in the wheelhouse, too, to put some weight up forward, because there was so much weight in the stern.

Our intention was to take it into Raleigh to offload at Arch Taylor's store. We left Belle Isle – the wind blowing westerly on the bow of the boat – I don't know what time we left, it was sometime in the evening but we finally brought it into Ship Cove at two o'clock in the morning; it was just too rough.

Looking back

Looking back, I'd rather things were like they used to be rather than what they are now. There was more freedom: if you wanted a bird you could go and get it; if you wanted a meal of fish you go and get it, but now you can't even do that.

The limestone barrenns are protected now, too, and you have to be careful with that. There was a fellow up on the hill with his son, and



Figure 5 Poppies

they were working with their loader, and some people come up to him and told him about those limestone flowers, that they were a protected species, and not to ride over them. I don't know what he said to them, but they haven't been back there since, but I know he told them he wasn't going to get down on his knees to look for no flowers!

Glossary

Dictionary of Newfoundland English

1. Pook: haycock; frequently used as a phrase, as in pook of hay.
2. Lead: a stretch of low, open country affording passage through an area thickly interspersed with lakes, clumps of trees and hills; such a passageway frequented by migrating caribou; an animal trail; DEER PATH.
3. Quintal: a measure of dried and salted codfish ready for the market; 112 lbs (50.8 kg); DRAFT.

Snapshots of Wild Bight: a Glimpse into the Past

MORAM DIAMOND

Introduction

Moram Brown was born April 1, 1934 to Samuel Brown and Leah Elliott of Cook's Harbour. She grew up in Wild Bight with five brothers and sisters. Her mother died when Moram was a young child. Moram married Samuel Diamond of Cook's Harbour, October 31, 1957, and they had two children, Wade and Ena. Shortly after they were married, Mr. Diamond's work took him to Goose Bay, where he worked and lived with his wife and children until he was killed in a plane crash in 1968. Mrs. Diamond lived at Goose Bay until 2000, when she made the decision to move to her present location, near Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Her pictures of Wild Bight are an insight into the past.



Figure 1

1. The two women in this photo are my grandmother, Martha Brown, and the other lady is "Aunt Sis" my great aunt. She was visiting. The house and barn in the distance were owned by James Brown, Martha's son. The garden was fenced to keep cows out. My grandmother was a midwife who delivered 700-800 babies. Dr. Curtis used to visit her.



2. (Left) Samuel and Leah, my parents. In this picture Samuel is holding my brother Edward and Leah is holding my brother Leonard. Leah was an Elliott from Cook's Harbour.



3. (Right) School Parade, 1954. Possibly a Confederation march. L-R: John Quinlan (cousin), Llewellyn Brown (brother) arms raised, Henry Brown, and Gerald Adey.



4. (Left) School Parade, 1954: Flags are the Union Jack: some appear to be homemade. (R-L: reverse order, starting at bottom right) Beatrice Quinlan, Martha Brown, Elizabeth Larkin, Christina Larkin, Jean Brown (blond hair) and, right over Jean's head is Margaret Brown.



5. Wild Bight Dog Team, 1954: Irene and Martha Brown on a Sunday afternoon ride. The building (top left) in the background was the school. You can see the fish store above the dogs. Fishing stages (right) belonged to Albert Brown.



6. Photo 1954: L-R: Edward Brown (brother), Ben Little (cousin) holding a double-barreled shotgun, Raymond Little (cousin of Ben) and Leonard Brown holding a rifle. Dog team sleeping behind young men. Erastus and Edith Larkin's house at back.



7. Photo 1954: L-R: Harvey Brown, John Brown (cousin), and Leonard Brown (brother) beside their house. The young men are either going sealing or returning from the hunt. Erastus Larkin's house can be seen, and, nearby, his new house under construction. A little store belonging to Edith Larkin is in the picture.



8. Photo July 1954: L-R: Moram Brown, Hayward Ford (teacher), and Rita Brown (sister). There is a garden on the left. Barely visible, between the fence and the people, are two houses belonging to the Manuels – Theophilus or Theordore – and the Adeys (the name was originally Eddy).